

TURN THE
LEAF AND GLEAN
THE FRUIT



ADDISON CAIRNS MIZNER
His Book

NO

DATE







GEORGE FREDERICK
WATTS

GEMS OF ART



HOPE

Painted in 1885

Exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery

In the National Gallery British Art



GEORGE
FREDERICK
WATTS

1817

1904

By
E. RIMBAULT
DIBDIN

1923

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
NEW YORK



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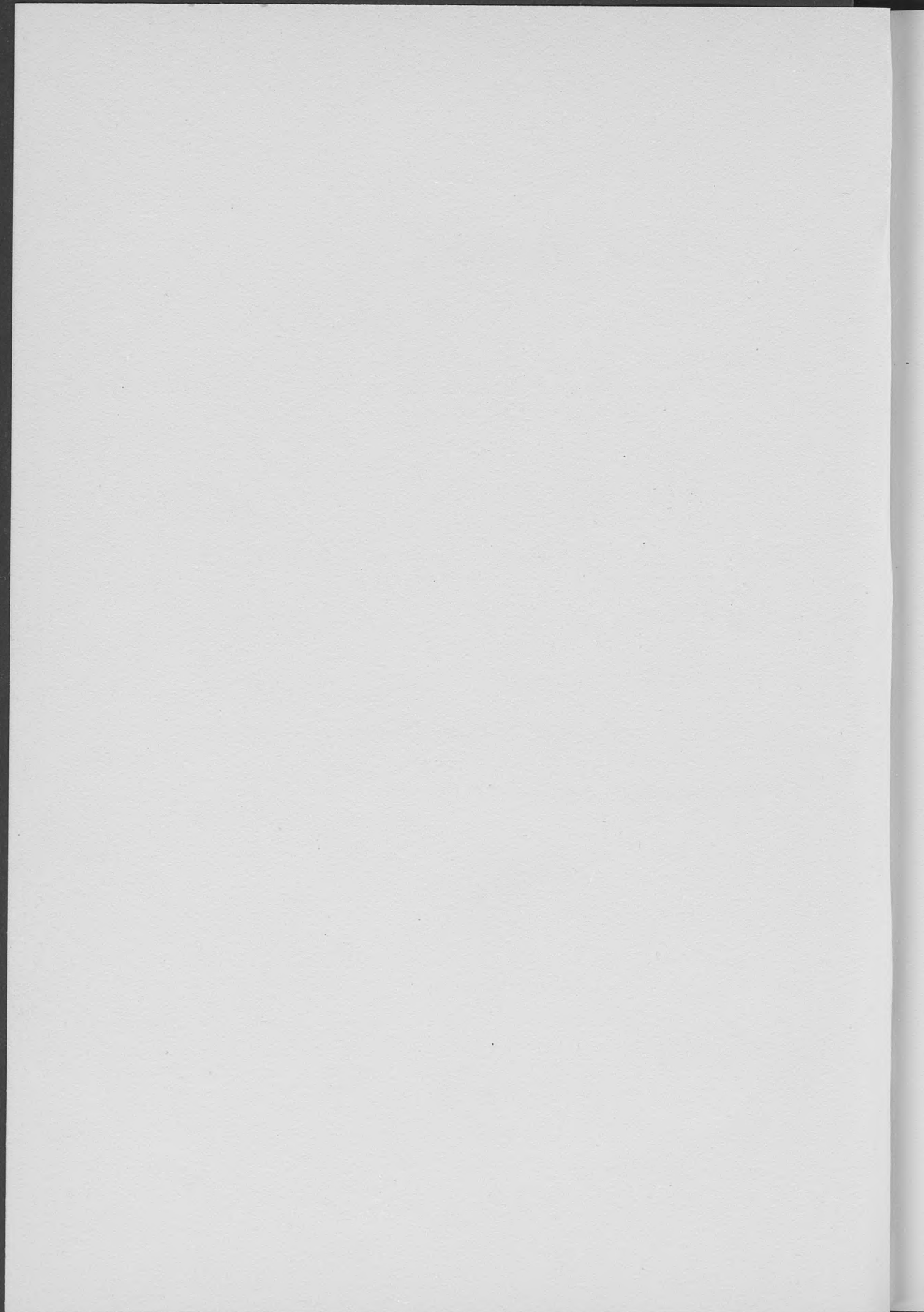
REYNOLDS



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INTRODUCTION

IN the very remarkable galaxy of great art creators who flourished in England during the Victorian period, one of the greatest was George Frederick Watts. It may even be, when more years have passed and that period has become remote enough for the final judgment to be pronounced, that he will be placed above all his contemporaries. We are still too near them, too much involved in the antagonistic influences of contemporary ideas as to the right aim and purpose of the Fine Arts, to forecast the slow but sure and inevitable verdict of the court of Time. Should that tribunal see fit to accept as its standards the prevalent conceptions of the present day as to the proper aims and functions of the arts, the achievements of our Victorian great men will cut as sorry a figure as those of the "history painters" of the Georgian period. A steadfast believer in the former finds it difficult to imagine that this will be the final appraisal of their worth; because they were inspired by a nobler conception of their function than that which seems to be now prevalent, and in their productions gave such sterling testimony to their faith, that in their time our pictorial art was truly great, and a very real factor in the nation's intellectual life. They were not merely dexterous painters but also able teachers; not of the matters which are the proper business of other professions—save, perhaps, an occasional excursion into their territory by, or influenced by,

Holman Hunt—but exponents of the two great things of which all labourers in all the fields of art should be the prophets : Truth and Beauty.

The long life of Watts included the whole period of Victoria, for he was born two years before her, when George III still reigned, at least nominally; and he died when Edward VII was on the throne. He first exhibited at the Royal Academy in the year when Victoria succeeded to the crown, and for three years after her death he was still painting with undiminished zest and vigour, and no indication of failing powers.

Even when we take into account the artist's exceptionally long life, the extent of his activities is remarkable, almost incredible. That accurate historian, Mr. Marion H. Spielmann, F.S.A., credits him with about 800 paintings, in addition to innumerable drawings, very large and important paintings in fresco, and a number of masterpieces in sculpture. Such an output was only possible to a man who lived for art alone, who took no part in art politics or any other aspect of contemporary life : not that he failed in interest, but because he felt that his primary business in life demanded his undivided attention and all his energies. His rule of life during all his years was to rise at dawn and work steadily all day, with only such intervals as were necessary for due exercise and meals, domestic life and for such occasional intercourse with his fellow beings as even a hermit must sometimes allow himself; and he was no hermit. Though by no means unsociable, and rich in innumerable friendships, he seems never to have permitted them to divert him from the passion of his life. He disregarded entirely the normal ambitions of the successful man, and only

became an associate and then a member of the Royal Academy at the age of fifty, by an irregularity of procedure calculated to make Joseph Farington turn in his grave; for he was nominated and elected without his knowledge or concurrence, and therefore without his having conformed to the rule requiring a candidate to put his name down for consideration.

Watts by no means ignored or disrespected the labours of his contemporaries, or their predecessors, as some of his occasional writings sufficiently show; but he never apparently felt an inclination to associate himself with any of their schemes and ideals. His serious and elevated conception of the artist's function was directly opposed to the current triviality and conventionality of his early days; those faults which provoked the protest made in 1848 by the seven young students who banded themselves together as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. He himself in his early work, like some other painters afterwards distinguished, seems almost to have anticipated the careful, exact imitation of the thing seen, which was one of their principles. Yet, so far as we know, Watts neither approved nor disapproved, and vouchsafed no recognition of the quixotic little band of youths fighting as well as they knew for important reforms in our art. Mrs. Watts, in her "Annals," writes of his relations with Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites "with the greatest reverence each for the other's achievements; there remained a difference, neither the mediæval nor the theological nor the decorative point of view was his."

The career of Watts is an outstanding illustration of the truth of the axiom that the secret of success is to know exactly what you want to do, and then to do it with all your powers

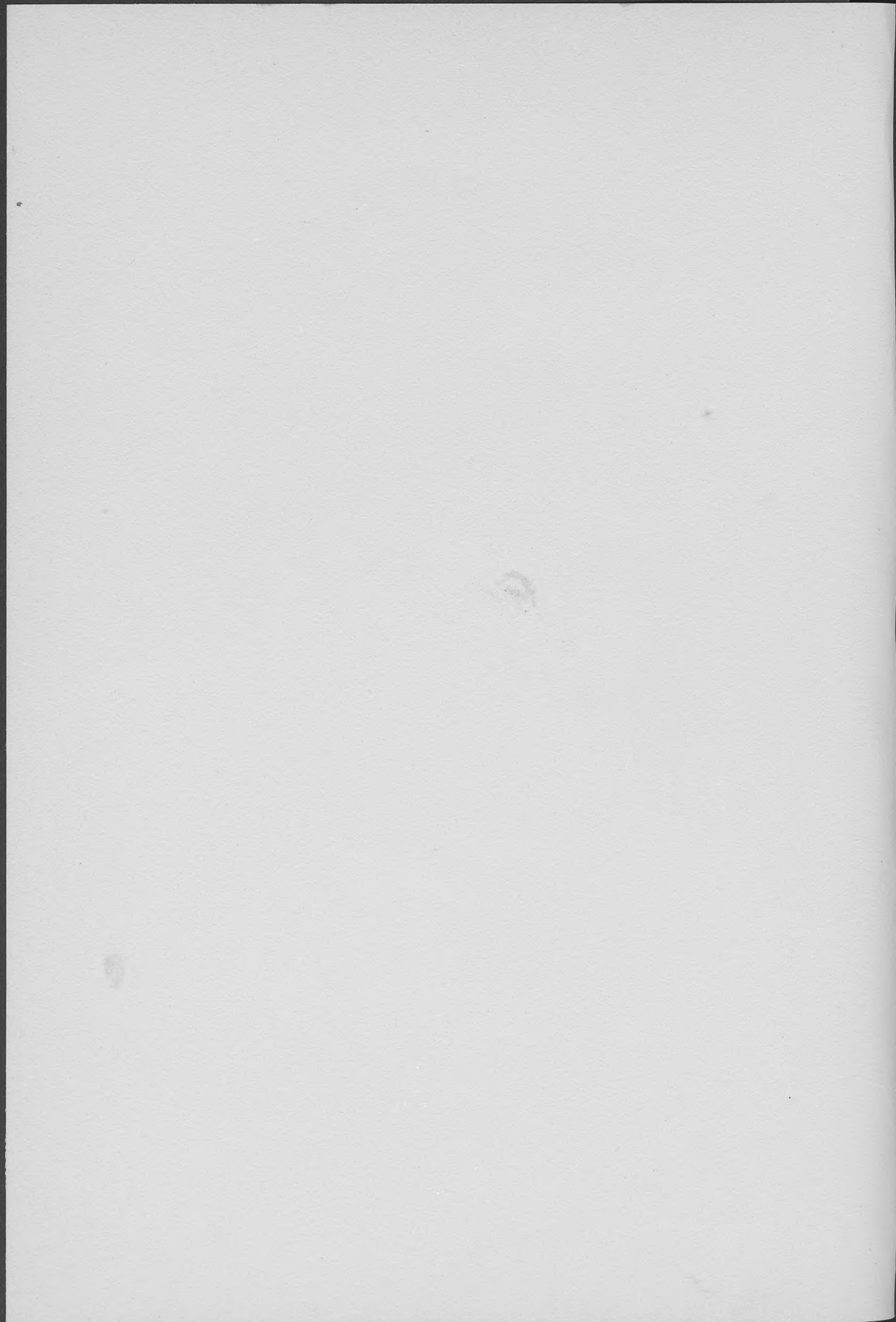
addressed to the task. He had no doubt ever as to his mission in life; he pursued it resolutely and untiringly, disregarding beaten paths; he tried his powers in every one of the major departments of the Fine Arts, and succeeded greatly in all. His life history presents a remarkable record of steady progress from beginnings not particularly propitious, to early recognition, rapidly developing into a well-established fame which, during the many years of his life, knew no change but that of increase. Honours that were his for the taking he did not have : they were not what he desired, and he avoided all, save that which came from the Royal Academy when they made it plain to him, by their offer of membership, that the leaders of the profession he so greatly adorned desired the honour of his closer fellowship with them; and again when King Edward, successfully pressed him at least to accept the Order of Merit. For a mind of heroic mould like that of Watts it was all-sufficing to have been able to live the life he loved best, to achieve very greatly in the art which was to him a religion, rather than a profession.

He shines in our memories with the clear steady light of a great planet moving along its own distinct path across the sky among myriads of stars of many magnitudes, some perhaps seeming to twinkle more brightly, some quite unseen and unknown, save to the curious astronomer : the dominant lamp among them all, save when momentarily a flaming meteor shoots across the firmament and dazzles the eyes until it is burned out and disappears for ever, leaving the heavens unchanged and unaffected; the tender light of the calm planet the most beautiful of all the innumerable multitude.

PRAYER

In the City Art Gallery, Manchester

(Purchased 1887)





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GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS

Chapter I : EARLY YEARS (1817-42)

GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS was born in Queen Street, Bryanston Square, London, on February 23, 1817. His father, George Watts, according to Mr. Spielmann, was a man of education and high intelligence, but unpractical in the ways of the world. Mrs. Ady, in her *Art Journal* monograph, sets him down as "a man of scientific tastes and considerable inventive faculty, who struggled, not always successfully, to express his ideas in this direction." All this makes one think of Thomas Gainsborough's eccentric and shiftless brother John, the inventor. Mrs. Watts in her admirable "Annals" makes the picture a little clearer. George Watts, who came from Hereford towards the end of the eighteenth century, was of a family (said to be of Welsh extraction) established in that city, where he had worked with his father, also George, as cabinet and musical instrument maker. The great invention on which he wasted time and money, and practically his life, was apparently an instrument, the sound of which was to be produced by the action of wind on strings, in the manner of the æolian harp : a sort of pianoforte with bellows. It unfortunately never occurred to him that, to succeed he had only to substitute reeds for strings. Had he done so he would have been the inventor of the harmonium.

The surname Watts is distinctly English or Scottish; so the Cymric strain, if there was one, probably came into the family on the distaff side, but at some distance, as his mother's maiden name was Smith, his grandmother's Bradford. The latter lady's pedigree included such Welsh surnames as Edwards and Pugh.

It has been assumed, perhaps too readily, that the distinctive qualities of the genius of Watts were due to this Celtic descent. Powerful imagination, consummate skill in design and representation of ideas, all the qualities that go to the making of a great painter are by no means the exclusive birthright of the Celt, any more than the characteristics necessary for pre-eminence in the other arts of poetry, drama, fine prose, music, and architecture. A tabulation of the great exponents of the various arts who have appeared in the British Islands would easily prove this, were proof necessary. The Celts of Wales, Cornwall, Scotland, and Ireland would show a fair proportion, but no more. Classification, however, would be a ticklish business, because we are almost all of such hopelessly mixed descent.

In the Fine Arts, Wales undoubtedly can boast of a number of remarkable men for whom Welsh descent is claimed. The list includes, among artists of the past: Mark Anthony, Sir E. C. Burne-Jones, W. Barker (of Bath), James Charles, H. W. B. Davis, John Gibson, Mels Griffiths, E. R. Hughes, William Hughes, Inigo Jones, B. W. Leader (real name Williams), J. F. Lewis, William Morris, William Owen, J. Havard Thomas, and "Grecian" Williams; among artists of the present day, Frank Brangwyn, Talbot Hughes, Sir H. Hughes-Stanton, Augustus John, Sir W. Goscombe John, Sir William Llewellyn, Tom Mostyn, Margaret Lindsay Williams, M. Meredith Williams,

and Terrick Williams. The curious thing about them, however, is that usually they have been born in England, and almost invariably their art training has been English or foreign. Richard Wilson was born in Montgomeryshire, but he studied in London and afterwards in Italy; it is to be observed that, like Watts, he had an English family name. The apparent necessity of exile as a preliminary to fertilization of the undoubted genius for art of Welshmen is explained by the Principality's lack of art schools and other means of study: a fault which it is to be hoped will be remedied by the excellent art schools now existing in such centres as Cardiff and Swansea, and the benign influence of the National Museum of Wales at Cardiff, which includes an art gallery, where especial pains are taken to get representative examples of native art. In 1914, the Director, Dr. W. Evans Hoyle, organized a special exhibition of pictures and sculpture by Welsh artists, past and present, which made a brave show for the Principality, with the help of work by Watts, and other men of note claimed for it by Dr. Hoyle.

Watts from early childhood was severely handicapped by poor health. He suffered so much from extremely violent headaches that ordinary education was out of the question. That, however, in the early part of the nineteenth century created no difficulty. Had he been born a hundred years later, school attendance officers would probably have done their duty, forced his parents to submit to routine, and so, probably, have wiped the ailing boy out of existence. To judge by the man we knew many years after, his father took great pains to cultivate the child's mind, and his ministrations had a very

powerful ally in the boy himself; for he was of a keen intelligence, curious for knowledge, and, most important perhaps of all, possessed of an exceptionally retentive memory. His mother, after long illness, died of consumption when he was nine years old, and his three younger brothers predeceased her. Two half-sisters by his father's previous marriage remained to mother the boy and their unpractical, unsuccessful father.

That from such ominous beginnings the child should live to his eighty-eighth year, and accomplish such great things, is truly remarkable. The saving quality in his fragile body must have been the possession of a will to live as strong as his mnemonic power.

From a very early age—almost as soon as he could speak—he began to use the pencil. There was nothing very uncommon in this; most children—at any rate those of educated people—begin, like the human race, with making rude picture-symbols before they learn to write; and an only child (as in effect this one was) and a delicate one is especially prone to solace its many lonely hours by drawing and scribbling. He also had an early propensity for singing.

In both of these practices he would certainly be encouraged by his father, who “watched him at every turn,” who presumably had more or less of music, as his business was that of “pianoforte manufacturer,” and who certainly drew and painted a little and was fond of pictures. The resulting drawings soon began to differentiate from the ordinary masterpieces which astonish the family circle. By the time he was thirteen or fourteen he was a most efficient copyist; Mrs. Watts illustrates a chalk drawing made by him at this period after an etching by

Blyth of a "Silenus" by Mortimer, which is a perfect facsimile and a most remarkable piece of craftsmanship. It was only a very sure hand that could with so apparently unsuitable a tool as a piece of chalk completely simulate the quality of delicate etched lines. By way of original pictures the boy produced a number of spirited illustrations of subjects from the Waverley Novels. Scott was throughout life his favourite author of fiction, with Miss Austen as a good second.

Such agreeable reading was, however, only for six days of the week. His father was a stern adherent of that queer Calvinistic outlook that obtained in the early nineteenth-century Evangelical school in the Anglican Church, and Sunday under his rule was a day of gloom, and the only reading matter allowed beyond the Bible and the Prayer Book was Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." This grim discipline may have had its effect in the formation of the boy's character, as it did later with R. L. Stevenson, who had it at its fullest under his father's iron Presbyterian rule. It was said of the latter that the accent of the Shorter Catechist was never absent from his writings; perhaps the Milton-like dignity of austerity of Watts may trace back to a similar origin. Once, when I was looking at the Watts pictures in the Tate Gallery with a friend to whom they were a novelty, my companion said suddenly: "Was the fellow a Nonconformist? He preaches like one."

The manufacture of pianofortes did not prove the road to fortune for George Watts, who seems to have had as ill-luck as Mr. Micawber, without the support in trouble of that airy ne'er-do-weel's optimism. It happened, however, to supply the boy with a very useful means of improving himself in art

Another pianoforte maker named Behnes, with whom George Watts was associated, had three sons, all of whom had taken to art; one, Henry, went to Rome and died there, William practised with success as a sculptor, and Charles, deformed and sickly, seems to have devilled for him and acted as his good familiar spirit, doing his best to keep him from business and moral disaster. Young Watts, of course, had the freedom of William's studio in Osnaburgh Street (till recently occupied by the late Sir Thomas Brock), and he fully availed himself of it; learning there, no doubt, much that was afterwards of value to him in his excursions into the art of three dimensions. Charles was the chief attraction: a good man, a wise and liberal-minded one, and an excellent counsellor in regard to literature and art. From him young Watts learned much, and it was he who established in the lad's mind, while expounding the beauties of his brother's casts from the Elgin Marbles, an enduring belief in the supreme greatness of Greek art.

Whatever his dreams may have been of wonderful achievements in art, young Watts did not fail to recognize that he must first turn his skill to practical essays in money-earning. He began to get commissions for portraits in coloured chalk or pencil at five shillings apiece, and by the time he was sixteen he was practically self-dependent: probably contributing a little to the upkeep of the home, which was in a poor way; the pianoforte manufacture having apparently fizzled out, leaving George senior to earn what he could by giving music lessons, tuning, and doing clerical work. Eventually his son was able to support him until he died in 1845.

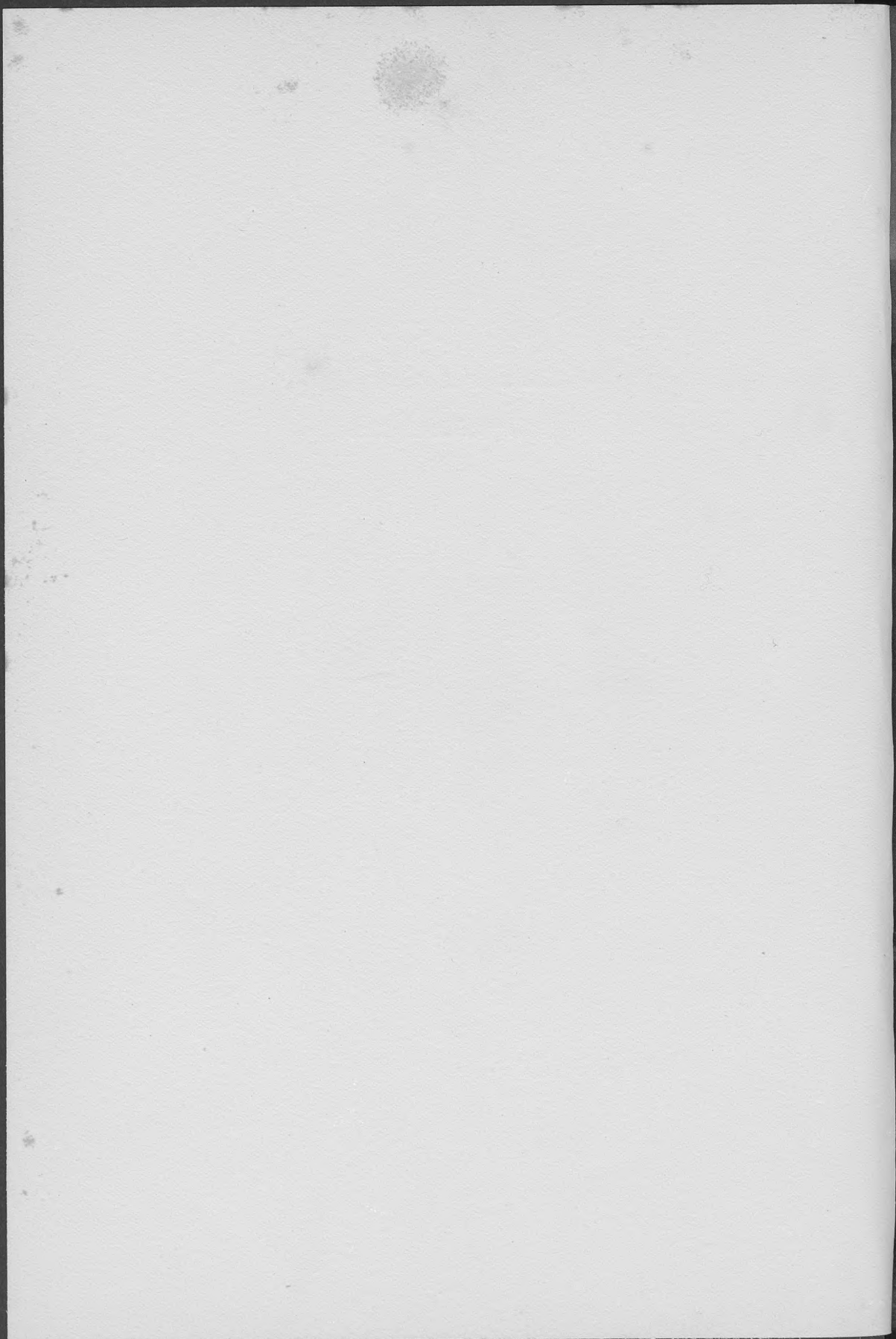
One of the afflictions that pursue presidents of the Royal

LITTLE RED RIDING-HOOD

Painted 1890

Exhibited at the New Gallery, 1890

In the City Art Gallery, Birmingham





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Academy as a set-back to the glory of that position is the tendency of fond parents to take the productions of their progeny for inspection, in order that they may pronounce an answer to the momentous question, "Should my son be an artist?" On the death of Sir Thomas Lawrence, in 1830, his successor was Sir Martin Archer Shee, whose versatility was such that he not only painted subject pictures and portraits, but aspired to fame as poet, novelist, and dramatist. In variety of accomplishment he was, in short, a faint forecast of the accomplished and brilliant Lord Leighton. Watts senior at one time went to consult Shee, with a sheaf of his boy's drawings. The verdict was brief and to the point: "I can see no reason why your son should take up the profession of art."

Fortunately, this damnatory judgment did not have the effect of turning the young aspirant aside from his chosen path. By the time he was eighteen he had clearly made up his mind to pursue it, for he obtained admission to the Antique School of the Royal Academy on April 30, 1835. How long he continued to attend is not certain. Mr. Spielmann says that it was only for a few weeks, but his name appears on the books for the two following years, and Mrs. Watts mentions that on two occasions his drawings were picked out by William Hilton, the Keeper, as being certain of a medal; the second of these a drawing from the life. This seems to cover a considerable period. In neither instance did Hilton's forecast come true, but Watts was comforted by the good man's consolatory opinion: "Never mind, you ought to have had it." This friendly critic advised him against beginning to attempt imaginative work, but Watts, as usual adhered to his own views. In after life Watts expressed

the opinion that the teaching at that time in the Academy schools was of no use to him—there was no teaching at all—no test—no examination of the pupils—an absolute lack of instruction; he never learned in any school saving that of Pheidias, and in that school he had never ceased to learn.

By 1837 Watts had attained to the dignity of a studio of his own, a room in Clipston Street, and he made his first appearance as an exhibitor at the Royal Academy in that year with two portraits and a small still-life picture, "The Wounded Heron," inspired by a dead bird he saw in a poulterer's shop. This he at once bought and limned on canvas with the speed rendered necessary by the nature of his model, but very thoroughly and well. Mr. Clausen considers it was painted with an ease and accomplishment equal to that of the best Dutch still-life painters.

More than fifty years later Watts one day, in conversation, expressed a regret that he had lost sight or knowledge of this early effort. Immediately afterwards he had a letter from a dealer in the North offering it to him. It is now in the Watts Gallery at Compton, Surrey.

At the age of twenty we find Watts fairly established as a portrait painter in a small but remunerative way, and thereafter there was no lack of patronage. Though in art he worked hard and studied hard, he found time to improve himself in singing, also to get a working knowledge of French and Italian, with some smattering of Greek, but never enough to enable him to enjoy his beloved Homer in the original. A very important connexion was formed in 1837 through a commission from Constantine Ionides, a Greek merchant in London. This

patron, well pleased with the painter and his work, introduced him to other Greeks; and the commissions from the Ionides family alone were very numerous : during his life he portrayed members of five generations.

The desire to paint subject pictures was hindered in its accomplishment by portrait work, but not prevented; what Watts desired to do was inevitably done. After some successful small pictures he at last made an appearance at the British Institute in 1841 with a large composition, "Vertumnus and Pomona." In the following year he showed "Guiderius, Arviragus, and Belarius." Of this subject he also painted one of his few water-colours.

The decoration of the new Palace of Westminster provided a great opportunity for ambitious artists, for which they were perhaps indebted to the suggestion of the recently imported Prince Consort. In April, 1842, a competition for decorative cartoons was announced, and in June, 1843, an exhibition of the 140 competitive designs sent in was opened in Westminster Hall. Watts, of course, had contributed one of these; the subject, "Caractacus led in Triumph through the streets of Rome." At the last moment he had hesitated to send it in, as it had been deteriorated in the attempt to fix it, and he had little hope of success. However, it was awarded one of the three first prizes of £300; the others being given to his friend Edward Armitage and Charles West Cope. This was a joyful success, for it at once provided him with means of making that visit to Italy which was still the highest desire of every young artist.

CHAPTER II

ITALY (1843-7)

TO a young man of twenty-six, whose whole life had been spent in London, with constant work as his chief pastime, living in a poor and far from happy home, and often depressed and hindered by bad health, the sudden emancipation which the prize brought must have been a wonderful and memorable experience. Watts, after crossing the Channel, made the journey overland to Marseilles, and his first objective was Paris, where he made a halt of several weeks to enjoy the society of his friend and fellow prize-winner, Edward Armitage. He had entered the Royal Academy schools at the same time as Watts, and apparently thought no better of them, for he soon went to Paris and studied under Paul Delaroche. They had somewhat similar aims at this time, and delighted equally in large historical compositions.

After greatly enjoying, in his sober way, the strangely new and amusing life of the *Quartier Latin*, Watts at last packed up and set off by diligence to Chalons; thence by river steamers to Avignon and on to Marseilles, from which port another steamer took him to Leghorn, and he was in Italy at last. Tuscany in the late summer is at its loveliest, and the journey to Pisa in a springless, open, country cart, though not luxurious for the body, was a delight for the sensuously perceptive painter's eyes.

Pisa, with its wonderful group of buildings, detained him a

few days, and then he went on to Florence. With his customary good luck he met there an English general who had been a fellow-passenger from Marseilles. "Why have you not been to the Casa Feroni?" he asked. "Lord Holland has been expecting you and has caused all sorts of inquiries to be made for you; you must come."

Watts had apparently never dreamed of calling upon the British Minister, but now, on this suggestion, he went, and made the usual good impression. Invited to luncheon by Lady Holland, he happened to mention that he was about to change his lodgings, and Lord Holland at once said: "Why not come here? We have plenty of room, and you must stay till you find quarters that you like." The invitation was accepted, and Watts remained the welcome guest of the Hollands until 1847.

To live in a palace, the guest of a distinguished nobleman and his wife, to mix with all the choicest society of Florence, to sit at the table of an epicure who loved the choicest food and wines, was a very novel and trying experience; but the Shorter Catechist in Watts kept him from harm, and the longer he remained, the more he was loved. At table he ate only the simplest food and drank water. With every inducement to waste time he set to work and was soon busily painting portraits, including those of Lord and Lady Holland, and trying his 'prentice hand at fresco in the courtyard of the palace. When the Hollands went to their country house, the Villa Careggi, near Naples, he accompanied them, and there he again painted a fresco in an open *loggia*. By this time the painter had improved his knowledge of the method, and the fresco survives: the one at Florence has disappeared. At

Careggi he used a large building in the garden as a studio, and it was in it that he painted "The Story from Boccaccio" and "Echo," both now in the Tate Gallery, as well as many other ambitious works. By way of a change of occupation he also resorted to modelling in clay and wax.

What he did not do was to copy old masters. He studied them; his memory was retentive, and that was enough. "He was convinced," says Mrs. Watts, "that a man who follows another must always lag behind; his aim was to find out the general principle upon which they had worked." When giving evidence in 1863 before the Royal Commission on the Academy, he replied to a question as to whether he himself had not gained great benefit from the opportunity of studying in Italy: "Unquestionably it must be so, but I do not think it absolutely necessary that an artist should go to Italy. There are in England quite a sufficient number of works of art to prove to him what may be done, and I think that with these and the Elgin Marbles it is not absolutely necessary that students should travel; but it is obvious that much is gained by travelling, the mind must be enlarged by it."

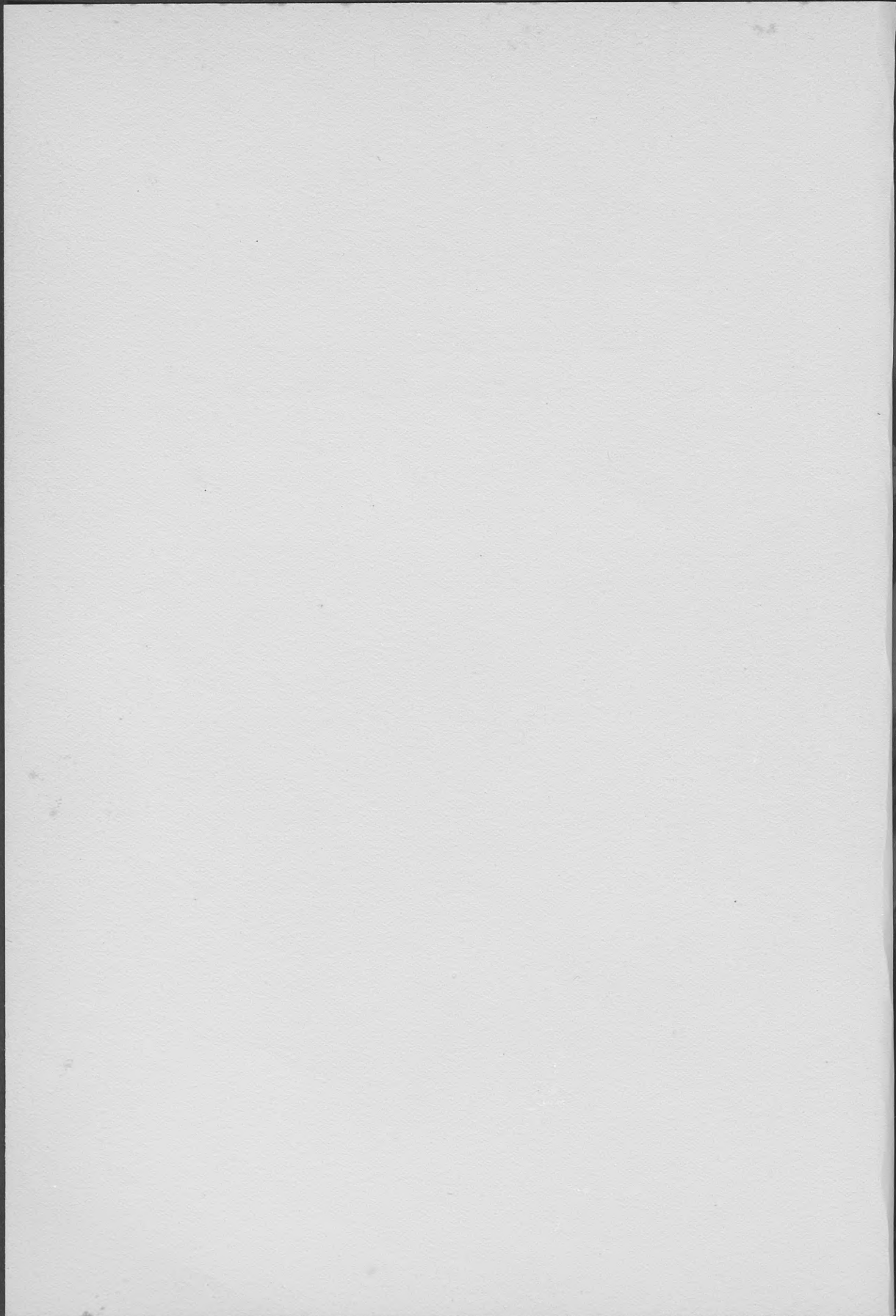
With Lord Holland, Watts made a number of excursions and also a short visit to England in 1845, which enabled him to see his father again before his death in the autumn of that year. There is a suggestion of some romantic episode which only resulted in the picture "The First Whisper of Love" and some efforts in verse.

There had been further competitions in 1844 and 1845, but Watts had not competed, though his friends at home urged him to do so and declared the Hollands were making him lazy.

LIFE'S ILLUSIONS

Painted in 1849

In the National Gallery British Art





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He at last determined to make a bid for a further lot of prizes offered in 1847, and set to work at Careggi with customary energy to design a picture of "King Alfred inciting the Saxons to meet and resist the Danes at Sea." This occupied him during the summer and autumn. In December he sent a full description of his scheme (the actual painting had not as yet been commenced) to his friend Miss Duff Gordon, with whom, during a visit by her with her mother and sister to Careggi, he had contracted a great friendship. This deserves quotation both as an excellent illustration of his pictorial ideas at the time and a specimen of his capable literary style: "You ask me to describe my picture of Alfred; the general design you are acquainted with. Alfred stands, as you know, in the centre of the picture, his foot upon the plank, about to spring into the boat. I have endeavoured to give him as much energy, dignity, and expression as possible, without exaggeration. Long-limbed and springy, he is about the size of the Apollo, the other figures are bigger, so you see my composition is colossal. Near to Alfred is a youth who, in his excitement, rends off his cloak in order to follow his King and leader; by the richness of his dress he evidently belongs to the upper class, and I shall endeavour to make that also evident by the elegance of his form, and the grace of his action. Next to him is a youth who is probably a peasant; he grasps a ponderous axe and threatens extermination to the whole Danish race. Contrasted with him you see the muscular back of an older man, who turns towards his wife, who, with a child in her arms, follows distracted at the thought that her child's father is about to rush into danger. He points upwards, and encourages her to trust in the righteous-

ness of the cause and the justice of Heaven (religion and patriotism). Behind him two lovers are taking a hurried and tender leave, and beyond them a maiden with dishevelled locks (your sister's hair), whose lover or father has already departed, with clasped hands is imploring the protection of Heaven. In the corner a youth is buckling on armour; his old mother, with trembling hands and tearful eyes, hangs about his neck a cross; the father, feeble, and no longer able to fight his country's battles, gives his sword with one hand, while with the other he bares his chest, points to the wounds, and exhorts his son not to disgrace his father's name and sword; while with glowing cheeks and beating heart the youth responds to his father's exhortations with all the ardour characteristic of his age. This I think my most interesting group. I have made the parents old and infirm and the young man but a lad, in order to show that he is the last and youngest, the Benjamin of the family; his brothers, we will suppose, have already fallen fighting against the Dane, defending their country. You see I endeavour to preserve a rich base accompaniment of religious and patriotic feeling. A boy, carried away by the general enthusiasm, clenches his little fists, draws his breath, and rushes along with the excited warriors; which helps to indicate the inspiring effect of Alfred's harangue. In the foreground two men lift from the ground a bundle which has been provided by the prudence of the King. On the other side of the picture some men, impatient of delay, rush through the water and climb the vessel-side, while others are engaged in getting it under way."

After nearly four months of extremely hard work on the picture it was almost completed when he started for home from

Leghorn, carrying with him five of his canvases, varying in size from twenty feet downwards. The parting from Italy was grievous to him, but he comforted himself with the hope that he would soon return. He did not do so, however, for six years, when many of his dearest friends were no longer there to make it more attractive.

Throughout life Watts remained loyal to the faith inculcated by Charles Behnes : Pheidias was the supreme artist; but in Italy the painter's own observations led him to admit one other to sit very near the throne. Michael Angelo as a sculptor he did not wholly approve of, "He wanted to give a stronger emotion and so sacrificed serenity." The "David" in Florence, he did not like, but of the *tondo* possessed by the Royal Academy he wrote "it is a thing of supreme and even pictorial beauty." It was as a painter that Watts considered Michael Angelo greatest, and he probably thought chiefly of the paintings when he wrote : "The Art of Michael Angelo, even if it were destroyed to-morrow, would live for ever in the work of other men whose minds have been moved by it." Of the great Florentine's work at the Sistine Chapel he said : "On the whole, as a complete work by one man, they are the greatest things existing." Then comes the characteristic addition, a saving clause for his fidelity to the supreme Greek : "for we know but half of the work of Pheidias, and we can judge of his greatness only by the fragments that remain, as nothing remains of that which happens to be mentioned in the very meagre written records that have come down to us."

CHAPTER III

LONDON (1847-52)

WATTS had no home to return to, as his father was dead and his half-sisters had gone to live in the country. He satisfied himself that they were comfortably settled, with sufficient means, and thereafter they gradually dropped out of his life. The impression is given that they were peculiar in temperament and not sympathetic either to father or brother.

He took lodgings in Charles Street, Berkeley Square, supposing that he would after a short stay return to Italy, and one of the many friends he made in that country, Mr. R. S. Holford, lent him a room in Dorchester House to use as a studio in which to finish his "Alfred."

It was sent in, and in June, 1847, there was an exhibition of the competitive work. The pictures which won the three first prizes of £500 were "The Battle of Meeanee," by Edward Armitage; "The Burial of Harold," by F. R. Pickersgill; and "Alfred," by G. F. Watts. Armitage's subject was the triumph, in 1843, of Sir Charles Napier with 2600 men over the Beloochees, numbering 35,000. It was bought by Queen Victoria and placed in St. James's Palace. This was the artist's third success, as in 1845 he was awarded £200 (the highest amount in that year) for "The Spirit of Religion."

The "Harold" and the "Alfred," with two other compositions

by J. Cross and W. A. Knell, were recommended by Sir Charles Eastlake, secretary to the Royal Commission, for purchase, to be placed in committee rooms of the Houses of Parliament. Watts expressed a desire to make a gift of his picture, which probably endangered its prospect of being acquired, as the commissioners quite rightly declined to agree to his proposal: they had chosen the picture on its merits, and it was right that it should be paid for. The artist at last gave way to a certain extent and named £200 as the price, and it eventually found a place in one of the committee rooms of the House of Lords. His aim in painting England's first naval victory, with its dedication to patriotism and posterity, had been to serve his country. Many years after, the same feeling found expression in the sentence, "If in the future any one writes of me the little there is to say, I hope that they will say, not that I had painted many pictures, but that my strongest feeling was for the honour of the nation." A wall-painting, "St. George overcomes the Dragon," was commissioned, and executed between 1848 and 1853. It eventually perished and was removed.

Meantime he was at work on two very important canvases: "Life's Illusions" and "Time and Oblivion." Here he first gave definite expression to his ruling passion to deal in art with the great problems of human existence. Half a century later he said, when leaving the New Gallery, where a collective exhibition of his work had been arranged: "Only two pictures there seem to me to come near my mark: 'Time and Oblivion' and 'Life's Illusions.' Of 'Time and Oblivion' I think Pheidias would have said, 'Go on, you may do something.'" This latter was described in the Royal Academy catalogue, when

exhibited in 1864, as "A Design for Sculpture to be executed in divers materials after the manner of Pheidias."

On seeing "Time and Oblivion" when it was new in the studio of the painter, Ruskin, with whom Watts had recently become acquainted, liked it greatly, and asked Watts to lend it to him. For a time it hung in his house. But Watts gradually became aware that the great, if sometimes perverse, critic's admiration had been dimmed by his newer delight in the exquisite rendering of the thing seen, by the Pre-Raphaelites, who were just then springing into notice. Unreserved approval of their ideals and practice necessarily implied a distaste for the steadfast belief of Watts that "in imaginative and poetic painting certain material facts must be sacrificed to convey the impression, exact imitation being then out of place." So Watts asked him to send the picture back.

Ruskin and Watts were great friends for many years, and they enjoyed many disputations on knotty points in regard to art; but the prophet of Turner does not seem ever to have been able to believe in the art of Watts, whose incorrigible underestimate of himself may have tended to create a prejudice: it is always more difficult to be exactly just—no more and no less—to painters one is intimate with, than to those whose personal qualities do not affect our opinion one way or the other. It would be easy to name painters in our own time who have established reputations almost entirely through a genius for self-advertisement. The exquisite, though almost irritating, humility of Watts, his subordination of self to his ideals, his entire lack of blatant self-assertion, probably prejudiced him; on the other hand, his sensitive, noble disposition raised up

for him troops of friends and lovers among the best sort of people, who were a great solace and joy in his constant striving, in spite of almost constant ill-health—or at least total lack of robust good health—not for fame, but rather to do something, if only a little, to be of service to his beloved country. In all his despondent, yet never peevish, utterances of self-disparagement we feel that the foundation of them all was the feeling that the passionate aspirations of his indomitable soul were ever fettered, and even partially thwarted, by his physical frailty. Speaking with enthusiasm of Leighton's merits, he said: "Nature got tired when she was in the middle of making me, left off, and went away and made Leighton." Yet Leighton, his junior by thirteen years, died long before him.

It is instructive to compare Ruskin in 1849, on "Time and Oblivion" (in a letter quoted by Mrs. Watts), with his sole reference to the painter in all his Academy notes. He wrote to a friend: "Do you know Watts? The man who is not employed on Houses of Parliament—to my mind the only real painter of history or thought we have in England. A great fellow, or I am much mistaken—great as one of these same Savoy knots of rock; and we suffer the clouds to be upon him, with thunder and famine at once in the thick of them. If you have time when you come to town, and have not seen it, look at 'Time and Oblivion' in his studio."

In 1859 he has nothing better to say than this: "I cannot criticise my friend Mr. Watts's picture 'Isabella'; it is full of beauty and thoughtfulness. I have no doubt that he knows its faults better than I do; and they are so slight that the public ought not to see them, but to admire it with all their hearts."

One gladly turns from this rather silly and certainly uncomplimentary utterance to Mr. Spielmann's hearty and deserved appreciation of "'Life's Illusions,' which, of all the works of the first half of his career is perhaps in respect of colour, the finest example, at once rich, tender, and subtle, with something of Etty, and something, too, of Titian and Turner, and yet wholly Watts. The picture is furthermore important for the first glimpse it affords of the painter's desire to appeal to the heart and conscience of the spectator, as well as to his eye and taste." It is of interest to compare this noble conception, full of elusive suggestion, with the contemporary picture by Sir J. Noel Paton, "The Pursuit of Pleasure."

In the same year (so far as it is possible to date the productions of a man who usually had as many pictures in progress as his studio was capable of holding requisite canvases; with the result that some were not completed for several years, and any exact chronological record of production is impossible)—in the same year, then, Watts produced his admirable portraits of M. Guizot, Anthony Panizzi, and the Marchioness of Waterford (a full length), of whom he declared that he believed she was *born* an artist greater than any England had produced, the circumstances of her life alone preventing her from working on to the full achievement. He habitually compensated for his belittling of himself by his generous recognition of the merits of others. A sheaf of imaginative compositions was also engaging his thoughts, including a vast design "which may be described as the ambition of one half of his life, and the regret of the other half." This, entitled "The House of Life," was never realized. He did, however, complete and exhibit at the

British Institution those two famous and noble conceptions, "Paolo and Francesca" and "Orlando pursuing the Fata Morgana," in which the principal figure in its superb pose and sweeping draperies recalls the rather similar nude in "Life's Illusions," and shows the artist, fully alive to the rare beauty of his conception, was resolved in it to make full use of its possibilities.

The history of this picture, of which there is a larger version, illustrates the manner in which many of the creations of Watts were produced. Commenced at Careggi and finished in London in 1848, it was originally laid in with the simplicity of fresco, thinly painted in broad, simple masses. Forty-one years later, having had the varnish removed, he converted it into a picture very rich in texture and brilliant in colour. When it was shown at the New Gallery in 1889 there were several would-be purchasers, but they were all disappointed, for the artist had made up his mind to give it to the Leicester Art Gallery; where it is now one of the most highly valued items in its collection of art treasures.

In 1849, Watts removed to studios in Charles Street, where he continued to live and work for three or four years. Friendship, however, did much to relieve him from a solitary life. Lord and Lady Holland were now in London at Holland House, and their mansion was once more a home from home for Watts, who had a room set apart for his use, which doubtless was often preferred to his own lodgings. He well repaid all their kindness with pictures and decorations in the house, regardless of the probability that the charm of his society sufficiently rewarded those who were so kind to him. When

his health seemed to need it, they schemed to get him away for a change of scene. In 1850, or 1851, Aubrey de Vere enticed him to Ireland, which interested him greatly.

At this period the resolution was formed by Watts to paint for eventual gift to the nation the distinguished men of his time. With what thoroughness he accomplished this labour of love can be seen at the National Portrait Gallery. He was peculiarly well qualified for success, for though ordinary portrait painting irked him, his interest was as keenly alive when his subject was a person of commanding intellect as it certainly was responsive to the charms of a beautiful woman. The idea was, after all, a sub-division of his scheme to serve his country, and one which did not present the same obstacles to his intention as existed in regard to great admonitory thought-provoking pictures, and noble mural paintings. It probably took possession of his mind when he found how successfully he had appealed to public interest by such portraits as those of Guizot, Panizzi, and Lord John Russell. The last of these, exhibited in 1852, was probably the first of the remarkable series, which his wide acquaintance in intellectual circles made it easier for him to carry out. Posterity will be indebted to his work in this genre more than to that of all the other brilliant portrait painters his contemporaries, for the truest knowledge of the outstanding men of intellect in the second half of the nineteenth century. On his canvas each stands revealed in his truest, noblest aspect.

CHAPTER IV

LONDON: LITTLE HOLLAND HOUSE

THE addition to his circle of friends of Mr. and Mrs. Thoby Prinsep, before 1850, was of great moment to Watts. It began when he happened to meet two ladies and a boy, and was fascinated by the beauty of one of them. On inquiry he ascertained that they were Mrs. Prinsep and her sister, Miss Virginia Pattle, and he then eagerly availed himself of an offer he had previously declined, on account of being busy, to introduce him to the Prinsep household. The painter's joy in the beauty of Miss Pattle was purely artistic, and he rejoiced in the opportunity of depicting it; but he certainly fell in love with the whole delightful family, and was soon in close intimacy with it. The liking was fully reciprocated, and Mrs. Prinsep seems to have been of invaluable service to Watts by caring with maternal zeal for him when he had a severe attack of his old trouble with its paroxysms of headache and nausea. This was so serious that she made him go to Malvern to have the advice of Dr. Gully, then in great repute; afterwards much in public notice in a very different connexion. Eventually Watts recovered. The deep depression of this period of sickness found appropriate expression in several very dismal but impressive pictures, such as "Found Drowned," "Under a Dry Arch," "The Seamstress," and "The Irish Famine."

The Prinseps being wishful to remove to a more suburban house, Watts suggested to them the suitability of one which he knew well—Little Holland House, a sort of dower house of Holland House—which was vacant. This was secured on a lease; the Prinseps went there, and some time after Watts went also: “he came to stay three days, he stayed thirty years,” was Mrs. Prinsep’s pithy statement of the event. Probably, however, some such plan had been contemplated when the move was made. Certain it is that the fortunate painter settled down most comfortably into community with a charming family, becoming like one of themselves; and there seems to have been no hitch at any time in their amicable relations and mutual pleasure in one another. The result was the making a painter of one of the sons, who in due time became well known as Val Prinsep, R.A. Many fine portraits of members of the family were painted by him from time to time; not the least charming of these is that of Miss Alice Prinsep, in a rich dark-blue dress, seated at a pianoforte. This was one of his experiments with copal as a medium, and was exhibited in 1861.

An attempt was made by Watts, through the influence of Lord Elcho—afterwards the Baden-Powell of the Volunteer movement of 1860—to get the directors of the London and North Western Railway Company to let him decorate the walls of the newly-built great hall of Euston Station. This, however, was declined, partly because of the expense and partly because the architect was unfavourable. As the only cost to the railway company would have been the outlay for paints and scaffolding, the first ground for objection seems absurd; but in those early days of railways their financial position was often very weak.

A commission to paint one of six panel pictures of great poets for a corridor at Westminster gave Watts little satisfaction, for the place was ill-lit. It was apparently unsuitable otherwise, for the six pictures rapidly decayed, and they are now covered up. In the summer of 1852 the painter's hunger for space to decorate was sharpened by the sight of bare walls in the great hall at Lincoln's Inn, and he made a proposal that if the benchers and students would bear the expense of material he would "give designs and labour, and undertake to paint in fresco any part or the whole of the Hall." Here, the architect was favourable, and the offer was accepted. The painting of the great fresco, "Justice—a hemicycle of Law-givers," forty by forty-five feet, was begun in 1853 and completed six years later; work being impeded not only by the painter's lapses from health, but because work could only be proceeded with during the spring and summer vacations. Watts, in announcing to the architect that he had accomplished his task, was, as usual, almost apologetic about its merit—sincerely wished it were better—did not expect it would be popular—but hoped and thought it would improve upon acquaintance. The general opinion was very favourable, and six months later the Benchers entertained Watts to dinner, presented him with a cup of the value of £150, and a purse of £500, "not in the character of compensation, but as a testimonial of the friendly feeling of the Society for the man who had selected it as the recipient of so valued a gift, and of its appreciation of his genius as an artist."

In 1853, Watts spent a holiday in the Mediterranean region, and again saw Italy, accompanied by Henry, the eldest son of the Prinseps, and R. Spencer Stanhope, who was by way of

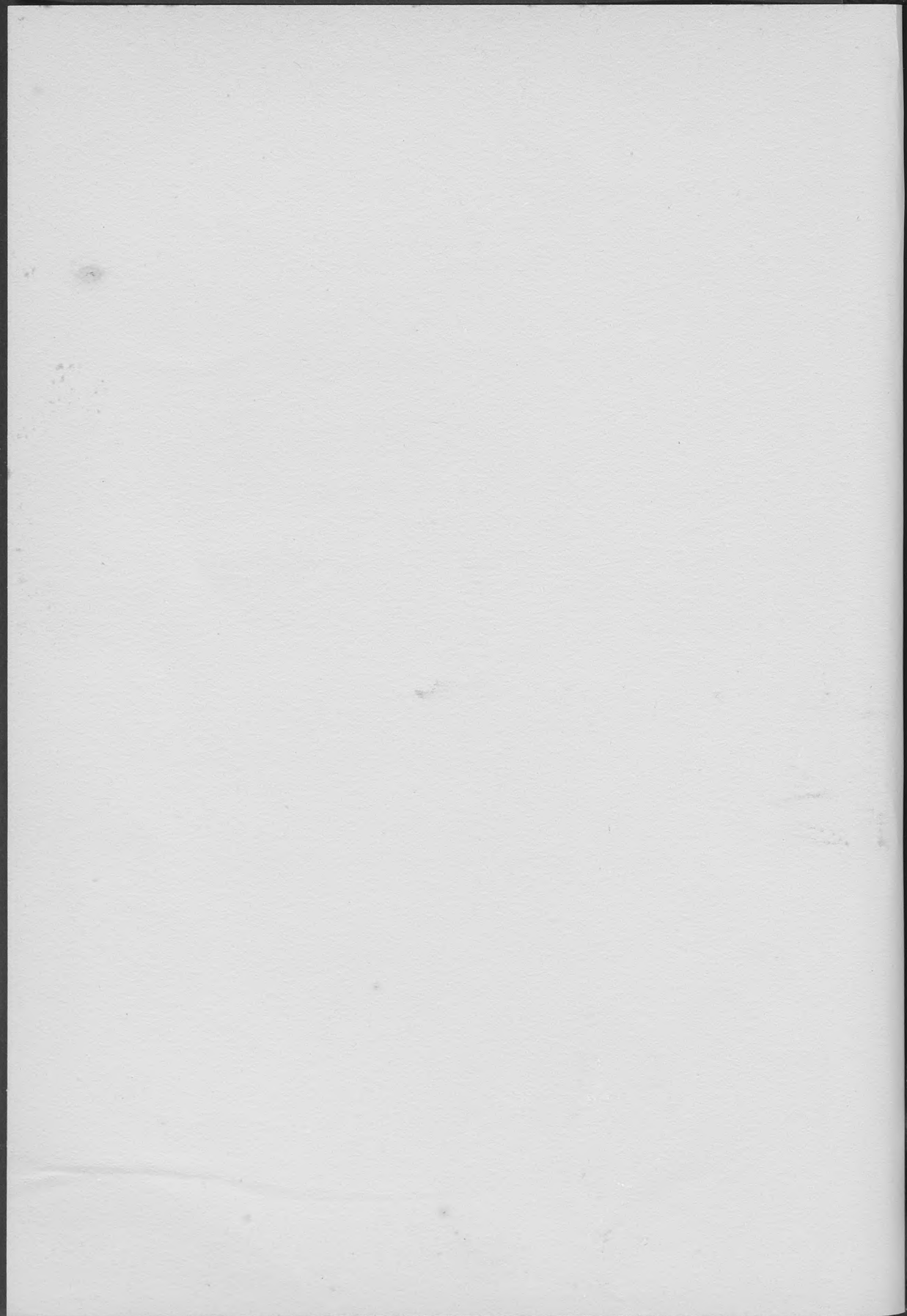
being his pupil, though there was little of master and discipleship; Watts treating him as a younger comrade. Going through France to Marseilles, they went on to Genoa, Leghorn, Pisa, and Florence; thence breaking new ground for Watts at Bologna, Padua, and Venice. Titian, Giorgione, with the other great Venetians, and the Duomo of San Marco filled him with delight. Going to Padua on the return journey, he was much charmed with the work of Giotto, so much so that he ventured to liken him to the highest of all: "There is in the Cathedral amongst other fine things by him, the figure of an Angel seated in a boat, that for grandeur and style might have been the work of Pheidias himself."

Another holiday, lasting some months—this time in the winter of 1855-6—was spent in Paris with Arthur Prinsep; the Hollands, who were at that time living in the French capital, being, no doubt, the attraction. He hired a studio, where he painted portraits of Thiers and Prince Jerome Buonaparte.

In October, 1856, he obtained permission to accompany (Sir) Charles Thomas Newton, of the British Museum, on an expedition to explore Halicarnassus. Young Val Prinsep accompanied him. The voyage was made in H.M.S. *Gorgon*, and on it he lived for eight months. He called at Smyrna to pick up Mr. Newton, and then went on to Budrum, where the excavations were in progress. Watts became a favourite on board ship. At Christmas there was great festivity after the English fashion; the sailors dancing and making merry. At an impromptu concert Watts took part as an entertainer "and sang Dibdin's song 'Tom Bowling' with such effect as to reduce the blue-jackets to tears."

A ROMAN LADY

In the City Art Gallery, Birmingham





Ample variety of experience was provided as Watts was sent on to Constantinople as an emissary to get a much required firman, and had an experience of the Turkish official genius for delays, which would have been very tiresome if he had not been enjoying the novel experiences of the place and painting portraits of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, the British Ambassador, and Lord Lyons. He also had an extensive cruise on a warship through the Greek islands and to Athens, which must have been a great delight.

After returning home in June, 1857, Watts found Tennyson a guest at Little Holland House, and forthwith took the opportunity of painting the first of his grand portraits of the Poet Laureate. At this time, too, Watts—or “Signor,” to use the name always given to him at Little Holland House—met Burne-Jones, whose work he greatly esteemed, and who became one of his dearest friends. The painting of decorations in the Oxford Union, which Morris, Rossetti, and their friends had undertaken, was about to begin, and Burne-Jones was one of the band. On the persuasion of Watts, who was, of course, interested in all wall-painting, both Val Prinsep and Spencer Stanhope joined the others. Writing of the former, he said : ‘I have plunged him into the Pre-Raphaelite Styx.’

Year after year the life of Watts continued uneventful, save for his achievements in art, his recurring lapses into ill-health, and the many people of the choicest kind with whom he came in touch : most of them soon becoming fast friends and admirers.

In 1858, after abstaining from exhibition at the Royal Academy for five years, Watts sent three portraits, which, for some capricious reason, he entered as the productions of

F. W. George. In this year he painted Gladstone, and began to paint a fresco at Bowood for Lord Lansdowne. A second was executed by him in 1860, in which year he helped Lord Elcho in the designing of the Volunteer Challenge Shield. In December, 1859, the death of Lord Holland at Naples was a very severe trial. In the late 'fifties and early 'sixties it was the practice of the Little Holland House family to migrate to Esher for several months, and "Signor" usually went with them. It is with a sense of unexpectedness one learns from Mrs. Watts's "Annals" that he was an excellent horseman and loved at Esher to follow the hounds.

A commission which took him to Blickling in 1862, to paint a portrait of Lord Lothian, was one which stirred his sympathy and imagination, for he knew he was painting a doomed man. This melancholy spectacle of a young man of great promise possessed of everything that heart could desire, fading out of life, in spite of the utmost efforts of science and love, is said to have sown in the fertile mind of the painter the germ-idea of his supremely great picture "Love and Death," the original version of which was first exhibited at the Dudley Gallery in 1870. It is now in the Bristol Art Gallery.

In February, 1864, George Frederick Watts, aged forty-seven, married a girl of sixteen. The lady had beauty, charm, and genius : qualities which have since made her as widely known, admired, and loved as her husband. The union was a failure. In sixteen months they separated, and the marriage was formally dissolved in 1877.

CHAPTER V

ROYAL ACADEMICIAN

WHEN giving evidence in 1863 before the Royal Commission appointed to consider questions relating to the Royal Academy, Watts had in his thoughtful and valuable replies indicated gently but firmly a number of matters in which he thought improvements were desirable. Answering a general question by the Chairman, he said : "It is very difficult to point out how the Academy might be improved, and I have not given much attention to the subject; but, considering the position the Academy holds, it has displayed very great apathy. I do not see its influence in our architecture, our fashions, or our taste in general, in any way whatever. The only national school which has grown up at all has grown outside the Academy, and indeed in opposition to it, that is the Water-Colour School; and the only definite reform movement (which the Pre-Raphaelite School may be called) was certainly not stimulated by the Royal Academy, and even met with opposition from it. . . . I have no kind of feeling against the Royal Academy. Many of the members whom I have the honour to be acquainted with I esteem very much indeed. They have always displayed to me great consideration, and indeed kindness, and as I was never a candidate for the honour of membership I cannot say that I have been overlooked; and I have not the smallest personal feeling of any kind against them."

This urbane utterance, and the sagacious character of the suggestions made for the betterment of a national institution, no doubt had their effect on some of the members of that body, who recognized the superiority of outlook to much of the petty opinion that obtained within it to the detriment of our art and artists. The Academy had scarcely yet emerged from the state which is now revealed so clearly to outsiders in the peeps behind the scenes given by Joseph Farington's Diary. When Sir Francis Grant succeeded Eastlake as President he set to work to get altered the rule that any candidate for associateship must put his name down yearly until elected; probably having in mind the declared opinion of Watts that this was "vexatious and unnecessary," and his statement that he had never been a candidate. Grant, indeed, told Watts that it was chiefly on his account he desired the reform.

Grant succeeded, and on January 31, 1867, Armitage and Watts were elected associates, although they had not applied. Holman Hunt had the next place in the voting, failing probably, although he was a better man than Armitage, because the old leaven in the Academy remembered that he had been a leader of opposition. Watts declined to accept the Associateship, but Grant, Leighton, and others brought pressure to bear on him, and at length he consented. Full membership followed in the same year, and in 1869 he served, with Leighton as colleague, on the Hanging Committee of the exhibition. The two were allowed to have their own way except in one particular: the rest of the committee resolutely refused to let them hang their own pictures above the line. Grant, although his wishes in regard to certain pictures were not acquiesced in, wrote to him: "I

think I never remember to have seen the exhibition so well hung, and I never before have seen such general satisfaction."

Resisting as well as he was able the demands made upon him as a portrait painter, Watts now was busy with a good many great compositions, including "Time, Death, and Judgment," "The Court of Death," "The Creation," "Ariadne in Naxos," and "The Midday Rest." He was also engaged upon the exquisite imaginative bust "Clytie," exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1868, which alone would entitle him to take rank among our greatest sculptors. The portraits, from the making of which he could not wholly escape, included such wholly successful ones as those of Lady Bath and Mrs. Percy Wyndham; the latter, one of his contributions to the first exhibition of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877, where also the "Love and Death" was shown, and created very great interest. The painting of commissioned portraits was not only disliked by Watts as a hindrance to his work on imaginative compositions, but because it was physically oppressive. "No one," he wrote to his friend and patron, Rickards, "can imagine the intense weariness of my existence as a portrait painter." Mrs. Watts adds, in quoting this: "It was really more than weariness; he was often prostrated by nervousness before the arrival of some new sitter; and he once said to me: 'No one knows what it costs me, and yet when I take people's cheques I feel as if I were cheating them.'"

Commissions for works in sculpture began to demand more and more of his time. A life-size memorial figure of Thomas Cholmondeley for Condover Church, a recumbent figure of Dr. Lonsdale, Bishop of Lichfield, and an imaginative

equestrian statue of Hugh Lupus for Eaton Hall, commissioned by the Marquess of Westminster (completed in 1884), were some of the great undertakings which obliged him to make more studio accommodation just when the tenancy of Little Holland House seemed to be jeopardized by the expiration of the lease and the impending assaults of the building fiend, now very busy in the region of Holland Park. The lease had expired in 1871, and the Prinseps were afterwards only yearly tenants. Eventually the relations with them were reversed, Watts becoming tenant. He built a house in the Isle of Wight, near Tennyson's, at Farringford; and the Prinseps (Mr. Prinsep being now an invalid) removed to it; Watts resorting to them in the winter months. He next built a new house with studios, in Melbury Road and transferred to it the name "Little Holland House," when, in 1876, he left the old one after half of it had been pulled down.

Apparently it was his work upon the Hugh Lupus composition that suggested to Watts his ultimate great achievement in sculpture, the "Physical Energy," not completed for a good many years.

One of the comparative failures made by Watts in portraiture was his picture of Thomas Carlyle (in 1867-8), who said: "You have made me like a mad labourer." Probably he looked rather like one under the ordeal of sitting, which, always disagreeable, must have been a grievous one to a person of his impatient temperament; especially if Watts imposed upon the apostle of Silence (in many volumes) the injunction he laid upon Gladstone later in a letter about a sitting: "Not a word to be spoken from the beginning to the end." Carlyle, however,

MISS ALICE PRINSEP
(MRS. STRACEY-CLITHEROW)
Exhibited at the Royal Academy, 1861









if so enjoined, did not obey, for the two had many discussions. Of course, the Elgin Marbles were spoken of, and the criticism of Carlyle (probably as incapable as a sparrow of feeling their artistic qualities) in regard to the numerous figures represented was that "there was not one clever man amongst them, the jaw was not sufficiently prominent; and," he added, "neither God nor man can get on without a jaw." He also opined that a long upper lip (like his own) was a sign of intellect.

The Diploma picture for the Royal Academy was painted early in 1871; its title "The Denunciation of Cain": a mythic personage who appealed strongly to his imagination and was the subject of several fine pictures. Eve also inspired him in several masterpieces. All these pictures illustrating the early chapters of Genesis were probably fragments from his abandoned great scheme: "The House of Life."

The publication of Rossetti's first volume of poems greatly impressed Watts, who pronounced him a greater poet than painter, and entitled to rank among our foremost poets. It naturally followed that he painted his portrait for the collection he was forming for the nation. The nation in the end had it, but after considerable vicissitudes, for Rossetti, in 1875, asked him to give it in exchange for one of his crayon drawings, and Watts did not feel able to refuse. After Rossetti's death the portrait somehow came into the hands of a pawnbroker, who sold it to Frederick Leyland. Watts then begged Leyland to let him make a replica of it. When Leyland's pictures were sold it was bought by James Smith, of Blundellsands, a keen connoisseur who specialized in the work of a few favourite artists, of whom Watts was one. His collection included a

considerable number of cabinet examples of Watts, of which, on his death early in 1923, eighteen were given by bequest to the Liverpool Art Gallery. After buying the Rossetti portrait, Mr. Smith found that Watts much desired to have it back, and he generously let him have it; but afterwards, on learning that a replica existed, he persuaded Watts to part with it. This replica (now in the Liverpool Gallery), in the opinion of W. M. Rossetti, was preferable to the original as a likeness of his brother.

In 1870, Miss Mary Fraser-Tytler, who fifteen years later became Mrs. G. F. Watts, first visited Little Holland House and made the acquaintance of the painter—then aged fifty-three. In the charmingly sympathetic and understanding “Annals of a Painter’s Life,” which she published in 1912, Mrs. Watts gives us a glimpse of her first impressions: “In 1870 the beard was only slightly touched with grey, his hair quite brown, very fine in quality, and brushed back from the forehead. I do not recollect that I saw the picture of the knight with bowed head, now called the ‘Eve of Peace.’ I remember the painter much more distinctly than his work; but he nevertheless so distinctly suggested to me the days of chivalry that I believe I should not have been surprised if, on another visit, I had found him all clad in shining armour.”

To Mrs. Watts we are indebted for many invaluable reminiscences of her husband’s life experiences, retold by her from recollection of his narration; in her he had his Boswell during his eighteen last years. One of these, relating to the Farringford period, deserves quotation, not merely because it is amusing, but for its glimpse of the conditions surrounding

the painter's life, when on holiday. The heroine of the story is Mrs. Cameron, a noted pioneer of artistic photography, a lady of considerable genius and irrepressible vitality : "A drive had been arranged by Mrs. Cameron, who wished to take the Poet Laureate, Mr. Prinsep, and Signor to see a newly-built house, and the view from it which she admired. However, on arrival they found the house was let to a German Count, who had no wish to be invaded by strangers. But Mrs. Cameron was not to be repulsed, she pleaded with her usual eloquence, and at last they found themselves in the presence of the Count. To him she then introduced Mr. Tennyson as 'the greatest living poet,' Mr. Prinsep as 'our greatest Indian Legislator,' and Signor as 'the greatest living painter.' But here the Count had had enough, and felt that he must thus protest : 'I subscribe not to that opinion, also in Germany we very good painters have.'"

The opening of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877 provided Watts with an opportunity of having his pictures shown in the intelligent manner now pretty common, but until then unknown at exhibitions; and he responded by sending some of his best pictures and helping Sir Coutts Lindsay in many ways. In view of modern ideas as to the most suitable background for paintings, of which we have strange specimens at the National Gallery, it is of interest to know "he believed the background for rich and low toned pictures could hardly be too strong in colour, and he preferred a rich crimson to any other." The walls at the Grosvenor Gallery were hung with crimson damask.

It was in 1879 that Watts made his debut as a writer on art subjects with a paper on "Present Conditions of Art," which was published in the *Nineteenth Century* for February, 1880.

It was a thoughtful and admirable essay and attracted much notice. Subsequently Watts published several other articles in the *Nineteenth Century* and in the *Magazine of Art*, under the editorship of his friend Mr. Marion H. Spielmann.

In Manchester, Watts had some very enthusiastic patrons and admirers, and in 1878, when the pictorial decoration of the new Town Hall was under consideration, proposals were made to him to fill the spaces left for fresco paintings. For the first time we find him hesitating over doing the sort of work that he most loved; recognizing that at his age, with his hands very full of other commissions, and his health always defective, he could not undertake one so large, which would require him to leave his studio and his home comforts for a long time. So Ford Madox Brown painted the panels.

Mrs. Prinsep, after the death of her husband, desired to leave Freshwater and go to Brighton, so a house was taken there, and in the autumn of 1876 the entire household, including Signor, removed to it. He found the change suited him, and took joy in the society of the children of a younger generation and his adopted daughter, Blanche, the child of a great-niece of Mrs. Prinsep. That he was, in spite of his years, thoroughly in touch with the young people, and a good comrade in all their sorrows and joys, is prettily illustrated by the incident mentioned by Mrs. Watts: "Once from the group of children about him the little Laura looked up suddenly to say, 'Aren't we happy chaps?'—a little saying that later Signor would sometimes quote, and one that it was always good to hear."

CHAPTER VI

FULLER RECOGNITION

IN 1880, Signor's super-sensitive nerves were rudely shaken by the news that his friend and patron, Rickards, had lent his Watts pictures, fifty-six in number, to the Manchester Institution for a collective exhibition. He wrote: "I confess I dread the result of your experiment—of the effect on the public of so many pictures by the same hand, challenging criticism under conditions of light, etc., not contemplated by the workman. I dread this unfavourable result, less on my own account than on yours, for I think it would give you great pain to have your old friends mauled by adverse criticism. As for myself, such things have happened to me many a time and oft; but, although I am not without my one share of an artist's sensitiveness, the contemplation of the wide distance on which I have always fixed my eyes enables me to estimate the present at its real value, and not to take for rocks the ordinary stepping-stones of daily life."

To the man who had succeeded in getting Signor to part with so many pictures, in spite of his constant remonstrances against the folly of doing so, no opposition was likely to be effective. The exhibition was opened, and had a remarkable success; also wide-reaching consequences, for it suggested to Sir Coutts Lindsay the idea of having a winter exhibition of

the work of Watts at the Grosvenor Gallery, in 1881-2, when about 200 pictures were shown. The enthusiasm it aroused among art-lovers and lovers of Signor was so considerable that, of course, it evoked a proposal to entertain him at a dinner, to be spread in the gallery. Equally, of course, the painter would have none of it—"all my instincts recoiled from the thing"—and was in such a troubled, almost angry, state, that the culprits who had schemed to do him honour in this thoroughly British way made haste to send him letters of apology.

Probably it was the success at Manchester that gave Signor the excellent idea of building an exhibition room at the new Little Holland House, chiefly to accommodate the large collection of paintings he had gradually formed, and intended as his bequest to the nation. This room was completed in 1881 and thrown open to the public on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

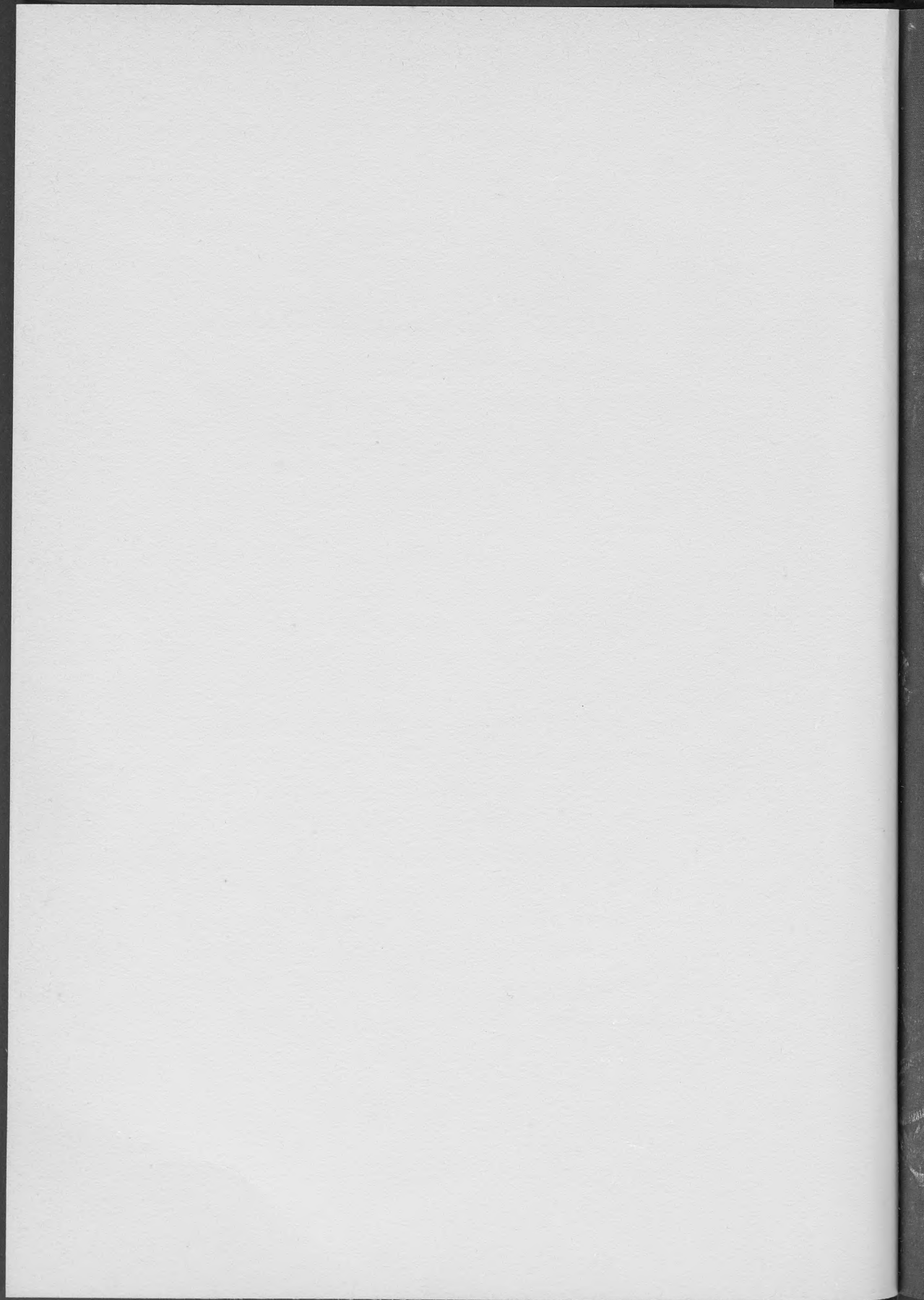
To the Paris International Exhibition nine pictures by Watts, selected by Leighton, were invited. Seeing these—her first knowledge of the painter's works—Miss Mead (afterwards well known as Mrs. E. A. Abbey) was so filled with delighted enthusiasm that she visited Little Holland House and promptly added herself to Signor's long roll of friends. She determined that his pictures must be seen in America, and, like Rickards, what she intended was pretty sure to happen. Signor, full of all sorts of apprehensions, tried to fob her off with a series of large photographs upon which he worked in monochrome oil, but this would not do. At last the Little Holland House collection was packed and sent off in September, 1884. The success of the exhibition in New York was so great that it was kept

ORLANDO PURSUING THE FATA MORGANA

Commenced 1849 ; Finished 1888

Exhibited at the New Gallery, 1889

In the Corporation Art Gallery, Leicester





open in the Museum until October, 1885. As soon as the pictures were returned they were in demand for the Birmingham Art Gallery, and from it they next went on to Nottingham. The Melbury Road gallery was not replenished until July, 1888. It is to be hoped that some satisfaction accrued to Signor from all the praise bestowed on his art, as well as all the pleasure it gave, in spite of his declaration: "I have no more wish to be praised for my work than a bricklayer expects praise for his bricklaying. If the wall answers a good purpose that is enough; of course it should be built as well as possible—so much a matter of course that praise should not be called for."

Watts had barely recovered from the shock of the dinner proposal in 1882 when he received a request that he should allow his name to be proposed to the senate of Cambridge University as a recipient of the Honorary Degree of LL.D., in recognition of his distinguished services to art. Watts, of course, declined—he feared the University might come to regret having chosen to honour him. Two years previously he had successfully warded off a similar proposal through the channel of the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, Dean Liddell, to confer the D.C.L. degree upon him. This seems to have been revived in 1882; and eventually both Vice-Chancellors vanquished his modesty. The degrees were conferred, at Cambridge on June 13, and at Oxford on the following day.

The next offer was from Her Majesty Queen Victoria, through Gladstone, who in 1885 proposed to make him a baronet of the United Kingdom: an honour which had never been offered to any painter. This met with a resolute refusal: a baronetcy seemed to him quite out of keeping with his life

and aims. "So you won't let them make you Sir George," said Thornycroft; "well, never mind, you will be Saint George, anyway."

In 1886, Watts, encouraged by the success of the collective exhibitions, overcame his shyness on the subject of his intended bequest of his pictures to the nation, and began to entertain the idea of giving them in his lifetime. He wrote to Lord Aberdare about it and, encouraged by him and Sir Henry Layard, made a definite proposal, and the matter was arranged. The chief difficulty was in regard to the due exhibition of the pictures; for the National Portrait Gallery collection was temporarily housed in the Bethnal Green Museum, and the National Gallery of British Art did not exist. A selection of the pictures was, however, hung at South Kensington Museum. At last, thanks to the public spirit of William Henry Alexander and Sir Henry Tate, the National Portrait Gallery and the Tate Gallery were opened, in 1895 and 1897, so that Watts had the satisfaction of seeing his great gift properly housed.

Two of the paintings shown at South Kensington were "Love and Death" and "Love and Life." The latter, which was the inevitable sequel of the other, is said to have been an especial favourite of the painter. Of this one of his "symbolical and for all time" pictures he wrote: "I have for years been endeavouring to understand and illustrate a great moral conception of life, its difficulties, duties, pains, and penalties, and I find that justice should be the mainspring of all our actions, and tenderness, pity, love, should give the direction; I think my best composition is upon this subject; Love and Life, naked, bare life sustained and helped up the steep of human

conditions, the path from the baser existence to the nobler regions of thought and character. This religion of Love has been acknowledged from the earliest times—then with an uncertain utterance—but is now beginning to be acknowledged as the foundation of all. This is forgotten in the heat of personal impulses, and from forgetfulness has sprung almost all the injustice and misery in the world. This is what my painted parable would recall. I would suggest frail and feeble human existence aided to ascend from the lower to the higher plane, by Love with his wide wings of sympathy, charity, tenderness, and human affection.”

One version of this noble picture is in the Luxembourg Gallery at Paris, another is in the Tate Gallery; a very beautiful small replica of it was in Mr. James Smith's bequest to the Liverpool Art Gallery, which also included a similar version of "Love and Death," and the original finished study of "Hope."

This last, which was painted in 1885-6, probably ranks next to "Love and Life" as a general favourite. The lovely figure of "Hope" seated on the globe, who at first sight might be mistaken for Despair, is surely very suggestive of her creator, who was much the victim of depression due to his physical unfitness, constantly over-taxed by his amazing industry of mind and body, yet never quite mastered by it. At that period he was especially oppressed in spirit, probably because of the loss of dear friends through death, and of his adopted daughter through marriage. "Hope" is listening intently to the sound of the only remaining string of her lyre as she plucks it with her right hand: may the painter have unconsciously imagined what very possibly was the state of his own mind; perceiving

one bright possibility as an alleviation of his forlorn condition, but half fearing to entertain it? He himself said: "But Hope need not mean expectancy. It suggests here rather the music which can come from the remaining cord." In a more familiar vein he wrote: "all the strings of her lyre are broken but one, and she is trying to get all possible music out of the poor tinkle."

Signor's "Hope" was in at least one instance able to get as effective music from her one string as a century ago the magician Paganini was able to draw from his one-stringed violin. One day he was gratified and moved greatly by a letter from a stranger who told him that in a dark hour of his life his attention was arrested by a photograph of "Hope" in a shop window. He was barely able to buy it, but he did so, pondered over its lesson, found comfort and support which enabled him successfully to resume his struggles with adverse fate. The letter concluded: "I do not know you, nor have I ever seen the face of him who gave me my 'Hope,' but I thank God for the chance of that day when it came to me in my sore need."

The other pictures by Watts with which James Smith enriched Liverpool are the portrait of Rossetti (already mentioned), two girl portraits ("Katie" and "Margery"), "Eve Repentant" (the original finished study), "The Magdalen," and the four grandly imagined "Riders on the White, Pale, Red, and Black Horses"; "The Wife of Plutus," "Ariadne deserted by Theseus," and "Europa"; in a lighter vein of fancy, "The First Whisper of Love," "I'm Afloat," and "A Villain, I'll be Bound!" Two pictures of this class were already in the gallery: "Promises" and "Cupid Asleep" (both painted in 1893), also the landscape "Naples," painted in 1882. All the

pictures of the Smith bequest are the more estimable because they are of relatively small size, suitable for an ordinary house, and therefore of the choicest quality; for Watts, though a great decorator, often displayed his subtlest painting in the smaller versions of his great conceptions.

About 1881, Miss Fraser-Tytler's family removed to London, and she set up a studio. As a natural consequence, she saw much more of her revered Signor, who with her, as with all young students, was ever as helpful, kind and inspiring as he was with young children. They gradually became close comrades, and saw each other more and more frequently. He had at last realized that what his life lacked was the right woman's care and companionship. In July, 1886, he told her so, and they agreed to marry. No definite plans were made, and the marriage might not have taken place for some time, but his bad luck for once did him a good turn. He fell into a very threatening state of health, his doctor insisted that he must winter in Egypt, and he insisted that she must go with him. So in November they were married, and "Hope" thereafter seems to have got her lute re-strung. A few days later they were on a P. & O. steamer on their way to Egypt.

CHAPTER VII

IN LIFE'S AUTUMN (1886-91)

THE honeymoon trip extended to six months, and Watts returned from it in what was, for him, good health, although during the interval his state had sometimes been precarious. A cold he caught at sea made the happy travellers halt, soon after starting, at Malta, where they spent a fortnight. Christmas was spent in Cairo, and the Pyramids were visited. They did not greatly interest him, but the Sphinx proved fascinating, and it became the subject of a picture. A dahabeeyah was chartered, and on January 4 they started in it up the Nile, on which Signor soon got rid of a troublesome cough, and enjoyed to the full the voyage to Assouan.

Arrived again at Cairo after seventy days, a visit was paid, under medical advice, to the Baths of Helouan, and then the travellers started for Constantinople, and by the way paid a flying visit to Athens. In the Pera Hotel some painting was done during unfavourable weather. A longer visit to Athens followed, and then the homeward journey was made by way of Messina to Marseilles. Two days were spent in Paris at the Louvre and the Salon, and at last, in June, they were home again, and Signor was at once hard at work on "Physical Energy," in spite of the troops of friends pouring in from day to day to welcome and congratulate. One special visitor was

the burly, virile Russian Vassili Verestchagin, who was showing his remarkable war pictures at the Grosvenor Gallery. He said in his frank way that he had come expecting to find an imitator of the old masters, but instead had found the most independent man he knew.

"Physical Energy" seems to have engrossed most of the artist's time and energy during the five months or so that he was at home. In November he fled from the prospect of fog and was soon enjoying the sunshine at Malta in a house he had secured when there a year earlier. Here the dainty little fancy, "Good Luck to Your Fishing," was painted.

In December, news of the death of Mrs. Prinsep seems to have had a malign effect upon Signor's health, for almost immediately afterwards he was taken ill, and he was for a long time in a serious condition. In February he was well enough to be taken to Naples, and there he improved sufficiently to be able to travel to Mentone, where he made a good recovery, although again daunted by news of Matthew Arnold's sudden death. In May gouty symptoms occasioned a move to Aix-les-Bains. While he was there the New Gallery was opened; his "Death crowning Innocence" shown for the first time, and so praised and desired that he decided not to sell it.

Aix having effected no benefit to health, a dose of mountain air was taken at Monnetier, after which the travellers made for home via Genoa and Paris.

By way of compensation for the fine summer of 1887, that of the following year was a wretched one, and Signor suffered in health. Harrogate was visited, but the waters of its wells and skies did no good to the patient. In August, Alfred Gilbert

began his bust portrait; he had eighteen sittings, for he said: "I want to make it my best work, the portrait of a man who might have been great in any profession, and by accident was an artist."

This year Mr. and Mrs. Watts wintered at Brighton, where he worked at his picture of Eve newly created, "She shall be called Woman." Lady Somers, seeing it, declared: "It is the greatest thing he has ever done!" Here, too, was completed "The Habit does not make the Monk": a cupid disguised, knocking at a door. "At whose door is he knocking?" asked a pretty young girl; to which Watts promptly replied: "Oh, at yours, perhaps."

Work was interrupted in February, 1889, by a bad cold, bronchitis and pneumonia, and little more was done before the return to town, where at the New Gallery the "Fata Morgana" and five other pictures were exhibited. Offers were made for "Fata Morgana," but they were refused: he had made up his mind to give it to Leicester.

Monkshatch, in Surrey, was chosen as winter quarters—the house of his friends Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Hitchens—(she, a daughter of the Prinseps)—and it proved such a success that the idea of a winter home of their own in this region began to take shape in the minds of Mr. and Mrs. Watts. The right spot was found, Hitchens bought it, called in Ernest George as architect, and in April the house-building began. This being arranged, Watts went to the Isle of Wight to paint a subscription portrait of Lord Tennyson for Trinity College, which eventually resulted in two portraits.

London was revisited at the end of May and a good season's work was done on "Physical Energy," the weather being

propitious. A portrait of Lady Catherine Thynne was painted, which was shown at the Royal Academy in 1891. The state of the Lincoln's Inn fresco began to give Watts serious concern, the atmosphere of London and the draughts in the Hall having adorned it with unintended and undesirable additions, executed in soot. It was a great relief to the painter when Professor Church took the matter in hand and laboriously cleaned it.

Another winter spent at Monkshatch was made the more interesting by the pleasure of watching the progress of the new house, which they decided to call "Limnerslease"; a happy title with a double meaning, for there was not only the usual meaning of the word "lease," but an alternative reference to the old English verb "to leasen," i.e., to glean, suggesting the hope that the aged tenant might yet gather precious sheaves in the evening of life.

It was a dark winter, and Signor's activities were chiefly drawings in sanguine, which in the spring were exhibited in Bond Street, with such a satisfactory financial result that the limner was able to cancel his lease by becoming owner of the new house. Several years later he was able to make it still more completely his own by buying the freehold. When light improved in the spring the large "Naples" was finished.

The return to London in 1891 was disastrous. An epidemic of influenza attacked Watts, and he had a very grave illness which caused great anxiety. His physicians, however, and his own indomitable spirit pulled him through, and after a change of air in Surrey he returned in excellent spirits and got to work on his picture, eventually titled "Sic Transit," which was completed in the following winter in his new house.

CHAPTER VIII

LIMNERSLEASE (1891-1904)

THE record of recurring periods of ill-health in the years that followed his marriage might give the impression that Watts was now, in the seventy-fifth year of a fragile existence, nearing its end. The fact probably is that during his whole life his hold upon good health was of the slightest, and similarly much interrupted by periods of pain and sickness. But until after his marriage they were not so carefully combated, and afterwards recorded, as they then were, by the lady who, with the most devoted care and self-devotion, enabled him not only to live on, but even to attain to a better physical standard. Some credit is perhaps due to the new home in Surrey and its delightful setting, which roused the nature-lover in him to spend much time in the oldest, healthiest, and most delightful of occupations—that of gardening. “How I do enjoy this life,” he said, when with strong gloves and a reaping-hook he set to work to persuade the wild tangle of natural growth into the semblance of a well-ordered pleasance.

To the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1892 Watts sent “She shall be called Woman” and a drawing, “The Youngest Brother.” The former was not regarded as a success and was “put up,” which displeased Watts, and obliged Leighton to

write him a long explanatory letter. Sir Andrew Clark, Bart., sat to him in 1893 for his national series; and not too early, for he died before the portrait was shown at the Royal Academy in 1894. A group of friends were successful at this time in persuading Watts to accept a gift of a grand pianoforte, which was the means of giving him a great amount of enjoyment. His love of music, inherited from his father, was intense, and eminent musicians, knowing this, often went to play to him. Had he been trained to music it is probable he would have proved as great a creator in that art as in the one which his symphonic imagination so greatly adorned. He had yearnings to create both in music and poetry, but found himself denied adequate utterance. Only in sleep did he become a great composer, dreaming resplendent dreams of webs of beautiful sound. Once it was a magnificent anthem, "Hallelujah, God is Great!"—it was quite superb in its grandeur, he said; if he could have written it down it would have stood for ever as one of the great things of the world. But, like the rest of "Kubla Khan," it was lost.

The death of Tennyson in October, 1892, affected Watts so much that he was ill for a while; when he had recovered sufficiently he went back to Limnerslease for the winter.

In 1893, when his Royal Academy exhibits were "Promises" and "Endymion," he gave a version of "Love and Life" to the United States. I seem to remember that some critics in that remarkable country found it to be indecent. New pictures in hand, of the lighter order, were "Iris" and "In the Land of Weiss-nicht-wo"; "Faith," too, was worked upon. In the spring he was actually prevailed upon to make a public

appearance, laying the foundation stone of the new picture hall and library of the South London Fine Art Gallery, an institution in which he took great interest. George Meredith was painted, and "Love and Life" being selected for purchase for the Luxembourg Gallery, he, of course, would not hear of such a thing, and presented the picture.

Mr. Gladstone in January, 1894, renewed his proposal of a baronetcy, and by so doing put Watts to the trouble of writing a long letter in justification of his persistence in refusing an honour which he seemed to regard as unsuitable for men of his profession.

In addition to portraits of Sir Andrew Clark and J. Passmore Edwards, Watts sent to the Royal Academy in 1894 the impressive single-figure study "For he had great Possessions"; a poignant and characteristic exposition of the futility of wealth. His "Jonah" in 1895 was not so well liked, but it was a really original and powerfully imagined conception of the ancient Hebrew prophet. He also showed "The Outcast: Goodwill," and portraits of Professor Max Müller and Lady Mount-Temple (black and white). The subject picture in 1896 was "The Infancy of Jupiter," and there were portraits of the Marquess of Ripon and Alfred Gilbert, R.A.

The completion of the National Portrait Gallery, in 1895, was an event of much interest to Watts, as it brought him within sight of realization as regards one part of his scheme to endow the nation with his pictures. Seventeen of his portraits were at once handed over, the others being temporarily disqualified because the subjects of them were still living. Watts was appointed one of the Trustees of the Gallery.

About this time fate had many hard knocks for Watts of the sort inevitable to those who live beyond "the allotted span," which to one so rich in friends as he are of necessity very frequent. The death of Leighton in January, 1896, was one of the hardest: "Half my life is gone with Leighton," he said. Leighton and Burne-Jones were his especial friends and ideal painters; with amusing inconsistency he took joy in their receiving such honours as he, in his own case, considered unsuitable for a painter. Other bereavements were the deaths of Sir Henry Layard, Lord Aberdare, Sir Henry Rawlinson, Mrs. Leslie Stephen, and his adopted daughter. All these losses may have been the motive forces that inspired the designing of "Love Triumphant," the small original version of which was now progressing.

The New Gallery Watts Exhibition of 1896-7 was even more important than that previously held in the Grosvenor Gallery. It contained 155 of his pictures and was greatly successful. The eightieth anniversary of the artist's birthday very naturally made his friends and admirers anxious to celebrate the occasion, but with a man like Watts this was not easy. They, however, managed to induce him to agree to receive an address of congratulation inscribed on vellum and signed by numerous distinguished men, with a sonnet in front, specially written by Swinburne, which, if not very brilliant, showed an earnest desire to be appropriate to the occasion by its references to the painter's works. It concluded with a good couplet:—

All these make music now of one man's name,
Whose life and age are one with love and fame.

Watts, with his wife and her sister, went up to Little Holland

House for a few days to receive the address, which was brought by Comyns Carr, Charles Hallé, and Leonard Lindsay; Mr. Spielmann looked in to offer congratulations, the director, secretaries, and staff presented a bronze portrait medal by Miss Elinor Hallé, and the President and Committee of the Arts and Crafts Society came with an address. Signor bore it all very well, and in the afternoon had full compensation in a merry party given to a number of children.

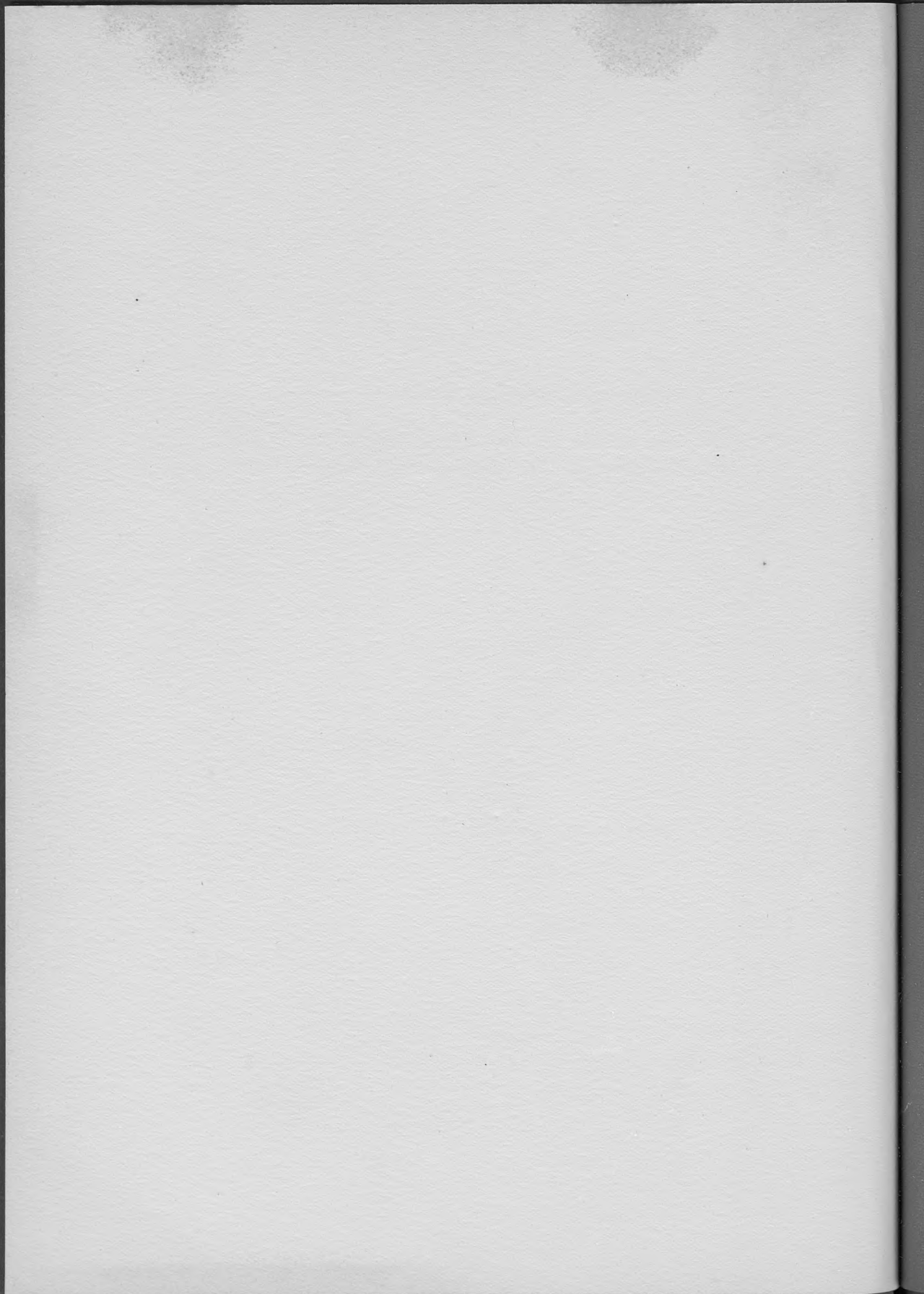
This great occasion was followed in a fortnight by an evening party at the New Gallery; Joachim was introduced as a bait, and Signor promised to go. The pictures on the walls, the music provided by Joachim and other fine artists, and the gathering of distinguished people made the occasion delightful as well as memorable; and Signor went back to Limnerslease next day quite pleased with his experiences.

The only picture by Watts at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1897 was a portrait. In the summer the Tate Gallery was finished, and he was able to hand over his subject pictures for the enjoyment of the nation. "Physical Energy" again occupied him much during the summer season. In 1898 he exhibited "Love Triumphant," and, disregarding his great age, volunteered to make a colossal statue of Tennyson for Lincoln, without any payment. This offer being at once accepted, he had to buy a small farmhouse adjoining Limnerslease, in order to use its barn as a studio. The work on this statue extended over several years, and it was not until 1905 that the bronze cast, which he did not live to see, was set up beside Lincoln Minster. The "Physical Energy" had previously been cast, and it was placed in the courtyard of Burlington House for the 1904 exhibition.

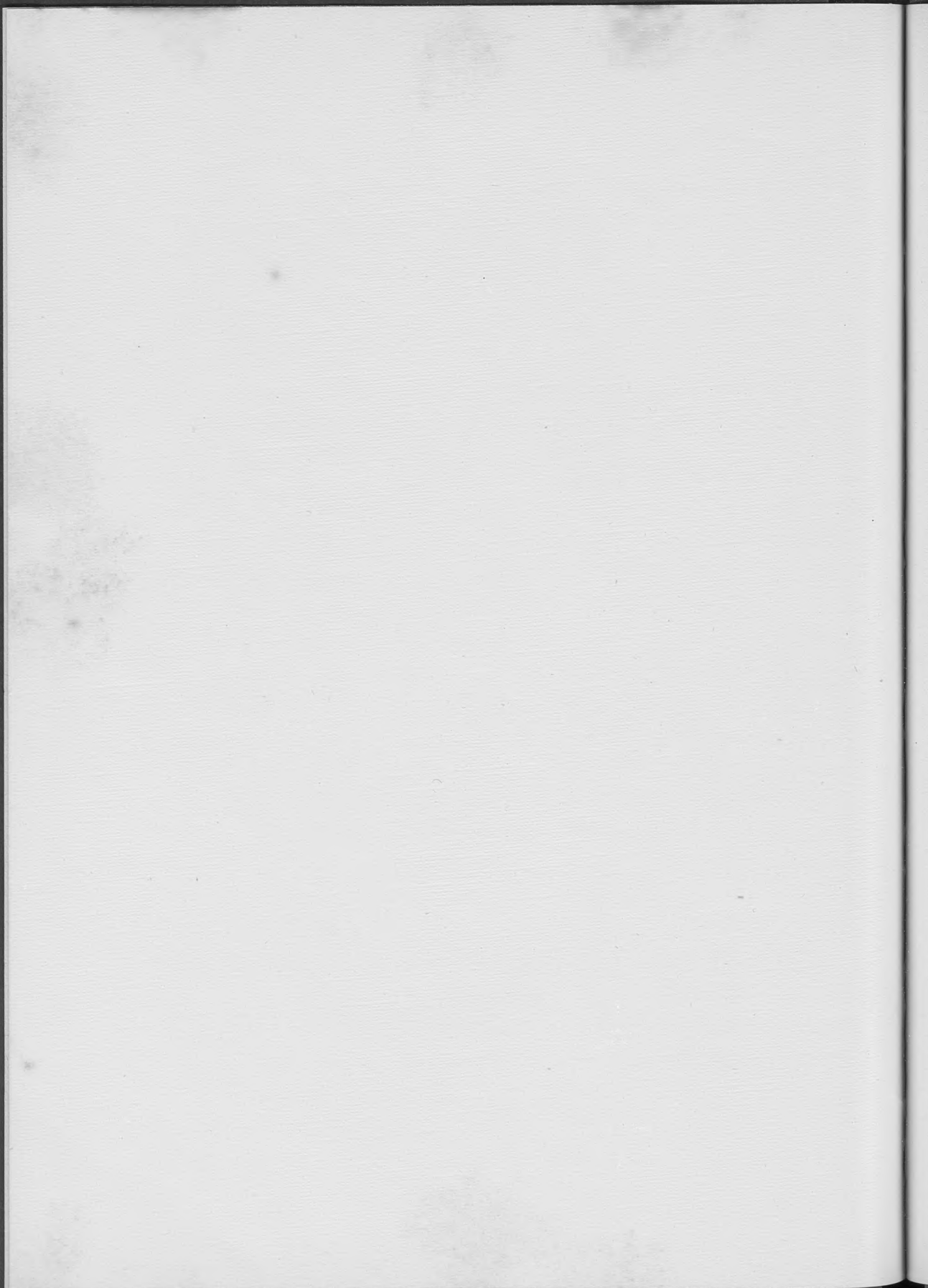
LOVE AND LIFE

In the Luxembourg, Paris

(There are two other versions of this picture ; one at the National Gallery British Art, and one at The White House, Washington, U.S.A.)







This casting of it is now on the Cecil Rhodes monument in South Africa; another later cast, after the model had been again revised, is in Kensington Gardens. Watts had been visited by Rhodes in 1899 and had taken the opportunity of painting his portrait.

The painter's only visit to Scotland was in that year, and he spent a considerable time in the Highlands with much enjoyment and benefit to health, which, however, was lost by too long a delay in the North that resulted in cold and pneumonia, which kept him a prisoner until November, more distressed by the outbreak of the South African War than by his own symptoms.

In each year from 1899 Watts sent only one picture to the Academy exhibition; in 1899, a portrait of the Right Hon. Gerald Balfour; in 1900, "The Return of Godiva"; in 1901, "In the Highlands"; in 1902, a portrait of Baden-Powell; in 1903, "A Parasite"; and in 1904, "Lilian," a portrait of a child more or less adopted by him. "The Court of Death" was completed in 1902 and sent off to the Tate Gallery. In that year also he was at last induced to accept an honour from the Crown and become a member of the newly-established Order of Merit.

The next enterprise of the indefatigable artist was to build a picture-gallery at Limnerslease, and he laid the foundation stone of it on his eighty-seventh birthday. Work went on with undiminished vigour until June 4, 1904, when he complained of a slight sore throat. He retired earlier that night, and did not enter his studio again. The end came on Friday, July 1.

During his illness the wish to live continued, and he was hopeful, as were those ministering to him, until within a few

days of his death. Then he became glad that he was going. Five years before, during a severe attack, Sir William Bowman said to him, when he spoke of what he hoped still to do in the short time that was left : "We have neither of us much time now." The great physician died in the following spring; Watts lived to do much, but always prepared, in the spirit of a remark made after that illness had taken a turn for the better, and hope revived : "I fancy it was near, but I have never had any fear of death; it has no horrors for me beyond the pain of leaving those who will grieve for me. I think I have shown in my work what I think of death."

CHAPTER IX

WATTS AS ARTIST AND MAN

THE life here summarily and imperfectly described is without any parallel in the annals of British art. That of William Blake comes nearest to it, and we find in him the same remarkable poetical imagination, the same love of biblical story treated more or less symbolically, the same mystical outlook and half-vision of things unseen by ordinary eyes, the same ascetic habit of life, in such marked contrast to a personality involving sensual love of beautiful form and colour. Both men began life poor and hampered by unpropitious surroundings : one remained always poor, and never even attained to a competent knowledge of many of the technicalities of art. He never was a painter of any excellence, nor did he produce pictures of size. All this may be allowed without in any way detracting from his greatness as an imaginative artist and a poet.

Watts, on the contrary, seems to have been born full-fledged as a craftsman. At twenty, with no more training than a short experience of the Royal Academy schools, which he said taught him nothing, and much talk of Greek art with Charles Behnes, he showed himself a master of oil-painting; before he was thirty he was an accomplished sculptor. He disregarded all the rules for the attainment of excellence, and yet somehow knew more than any of his contemporaries.

To find a parallel to his grasp of the Fine Arts as a whole, we have to look to mediæval Italy or his beloved Greece. As regards the giants in art of that wonderful nation, the source from which all European art sprung, we have little more than conjecture as to their individual attainments. Watts, from the fragmentary evidence that remains, confidently imagined men—or, at any rate, one man—supremely great : who shall say that he was wrong? We do know with certainty that some few of the Italians were as versatile as great : Michael Angelo, Giotto, Leonardo, and perhaps some others. But among them all we may look in vain for one who had that Blake-like mystical endowment which was so remarkable in Watts; or, unless it be Fra Angelico, that saintly purity and loftiness of character that no contact with life during his long career could sully. He dwelt among his fellow men and women, entered into their joys and sorrows, captured all their love, saw most things that life had to show; yet remained, like the angel in the old ballad who came to dwell on earth awhile, a creature apart, stainless, noble, and almost divine in spirit.

To what extent the physical disabilities of Watts contributed to this differentiation from other men is a question for physiologists. A person so handicapped as he by lifelong infirm health, must make some concession to his weakness : it is to his honour that the necessary deduction was wholly made from the usual indulgences of life; nothing at all from the fullest expression and pursuit of his art. He lived whole-heartedly for art, weaving into it and thereby adding to the significance of his production his other passion of patriotism.

So far, I have spoken only of the unusual and remarkable

range of achievement we find in the art of Watts, without any suggestion of comparison with others save in the matter of versatility. I do not say that he was greater than Blake, because he could do so much that was out of Blake's power. Blake is now seen by us in the full perspective which only time gives. Watts was of a later period, which is still too near for definite judgments. The swing of the pendulum has brought us to conceptions of art which are wholly opposed to those that sufficed for Watts as they sufficed for his great predecessors. In the Fine Arts, as indeed in all the arts, the current faith seems to be that the principal purpose is to exhibit dexterity, regardless of subject-matter. We are to wonder at the painter and his cleverness; not on any account to be distracted by the subject or the ideas represented. Subject is indeed a fatal defect, especially if it be noble.

Not until the slow pendulum swings again will there be a prospect of finding Watts placed as high as his admirers believe he deserves to be ranked among the greater British artists. For an illustration of how he is already esteemed by the most intelligent critics of to-day I cannot do better than refer to Mr. George Clausen's "Aims and Ideals in Art," a series of lectures to Royal Academy students; admirable pronouncements on many art subjects, and incidentally containing the truest analysis and appreciation of Watts that has been written.

As a painter of portraits, at least, the fame of Watts seems to be secure. Merely considered as likenesses they are, as we who have seen some of the originals, convincingly true. As painting, the pictures are masterly in craftsmanship, and splendid in colour and modelling; add to all this the supreme

merit that Watts aimed at and excelled in to a remarkable degree, the highest purpose of a portrait painter—that which finally differentiates him from a photographer—that of showing to us the character, the very soul of his subject. In this respect he was, in an age of remarkable portrait painters, the greatest of them all. We should be grateful to the memory of the man who devoted so much time and energy to recording for posterity many of the greatest among his contemporaries; recording with such a master hand that these people seem almost to live again before us. This was all done without fee or reward—solely for love of England.

In the portraiture of children he was admirable: a very rare gift. But he loved children, and his fine power of observation, retentive memory, and habit of painting without direct reference to the model, qualified him for success. Pictures in this genre are eloquent of that love for the little folk without which complete rendering of their peculiar charm is not possible. His “Little Red Riding-Hood,” in the Birmingham Gallery, is an excellent example: a perfect realization of the little rustic child of the nursery story; suddenly standing at bay when she sees the wolf coming. The wolf is not in the picture—that would be a clumsy addition—we see it in her fixed regard, and the tighter clutch with which she holds her basket.

Here we see his perfection as an illustrator: he was not prone to illustrate the imaginations of others; having ample store of his own. But when he did illustrate he did it perfectly, showing a great capacity for assimilating and reproducing the spirit of his author, yet without surrendering his personal outlook; and adding something from his own imaginative store.

His early performances in the way of historical painting were probably due to circumstance and not to inclination, for when the occasion ceased to present itself he did no more. But how capable he was of excellence in that style is shown by his "Alfred," so dexterously composed and so palpitating with life and emotion: far ahead of the productions of his friend the incorrigible maker of history pictures, Armitage. His passionate patriotism made a really living thing even of an exercise in the moribund art of history painting. Here is his emphatic opinion on the subject: "The so-called historical picture, unless dealing with contemporary subjects, is but a costume picture, and will convey very little to the spectator. The artist who paints Cæsar encouraging the boatman who bore him to his fortunes, knows no more about Cæsar than the purchaser of the picture, who will learn from it nothing worth putting into his head, though perhaps the record may be worth something, for it is well to be reminded of constancy and courage."

His greatest work in this way was in subjects drawn either from the Bible or from Hellenic mythology. In the latter his intense study of Greek sculpture qualified him for sure success; in the former he was no less at home. The Bible was for him a most real and wonderful book to which his imagination was quickly responsive. The themes he chose were usually enriched by him with symbolical meanings from his own store of wisdom. These found fullest expression, however, in the allegorical or symbolical creations such as "Love and Death," "Love and Life," "Time, Death and Judgment," and "The Court of Death." It is difficult to imagine that his pictures in this class can ever become out of date or effectless: he created them out

of eternal verities with a force and beauty that seem likely to defy changes of taste, short of a complete disappearance of interest in great thoughts and great art.

His capacity as a painter of still life was sufficiently established in his youth; it pervades his pictures to an extent not always noticed, for he knew better than to make it more than ancillary to the main theme. As an animal painter his competence is shown by such subjects as "A Patient Life of Unrewarded Toil" and "The Midday Rest." His gentle, genial vein of humour occasionally had expression on canvas, as in "B.C., or The First Oyster," "The Habit does not make the Monk," "Trifles light as Air," "Bo-peep," "Good Luck to your Fishing," and other little pictures in which *bambini* are represented.

In landscape he did work of great excellence and intensely personal : impressions rather than observations of noble subjects; but not impressions in the current meaning of the word. He first made an appearance as painter of landscape in 1868, in the same exhibition which included his first exhibited sculpture, the bust "Clytie." One may trace in his landscapes the influence of other men, especially of Turner and Titian; but Watts had a very definite style of his own, and was incapable of being a plagiarist. His drawings were masterly, and we know that he was, above all things, a great decorator, with keen ambitions to measure his powers in fresco against those of mediæval Angelo and Raphael. Added to all this, he did enough in sculpture to prove that, if he had never handled brush or pencil, he might still have taken rank among the greatest in British art.

The occasional writings of Watts—always pregnant with thought, and excellently expressed—contain many *dicta* which are of value for students. In this place some quotation may be made of what he has to say about his own art: "I cannot claim more for my pictures than that they are thoughts, attempts to embody visionary ideas. But I believe that from a successful attempt to carry out the principle which governs my efforts might come the noblest pictures the world has seen. All I claim is to be pioneer in the direction of artistic thought, the key to understanding my representations being that the interpretation should be the widest; that each should find these suggestions shaping his best thoughts; and that the members of every creed and every sect may find in it what he holds as best.

"I have used human forms because there are no others by which it would be at all possible to suggest ideas belonging to human conditions, but I have purposely abstained from any attempt to make the figures seem real, or vividly to awake recollections of reality, feeling the necessity of the atmosphere of remoteness, and knowing that familiarity produces a sense of the commonplace.

"The material language of art cannot teach with Plato, or preach with Bossuet, but with the aid of beauty and nobility in form and colour, art may not be without power to stir in the mind the sense of the essential human qualities, the great distinctively human attributes not bestowed upon the lower orders of creation. For many years I have devoted my thoughts and labour to an attempt to carry out this scheme of suggestiveness in art. . . .

"Impressed as I am by the idea that art in the beginning,

when noblest, was symbolical, and took the place literature has since occupied, it seemed desirable to me to make some effort against the prevailing principle that art may not suggest to the mind religious or ethical thought, and that the more intention of a reflective kind there might be in a painting or piece of sculpture, the less it could be truly a work of art. A disastrous principle, especially when so much varied intellect is employed, and so many varied outlets of effort are needed. Art must be allowed the same range as poetry and literature—the graceful, the sentimental, the historical, the ethical, the religious—else it is not worth the serious attention of intellect and culture.

“The little I can do, for beyond intention and direction it is little indeed (and I need hardly add that the Parthenon and Sistine Chapel are always in my mind as tests), the little I can do has been consciously for many years an effort after the best, not only as far as technical qualities are concerned, but also with the earnest desire to be on a level with the best endeavours of the age, or at least to be in accordance with them. I know it is given only to the few to influence, and I do not aspire to be of the chosen, but I acknowledge the mission of the inspired, and send out my heart and soul to them with what answering beat of pulse is possible to me. If I cannot be among those who have made art a great expression of religious and poetic ideas, I will at least be of those who have greatly cared for its dignity, which I make a duty to uphold.”

The painter who was distinctively among his contemporaries a poetical creator was naturally often during his career the occasion of poetry in others who were charmed and moved by his creations. Mr. F. W. H. Myers wrote, and the *Fortnightly*

Review published, an excellent set of verses at the time when the Watts exhibition was open; a quotation from it may fitly and gracefully conclude this monograph :—

For many a year the master wrought,
And wisdom deepened slow with years;
Guest-chambers of his inmost thought
Were filled with shapes too stern for tears;
Yet Joy was there, and murmuring Love,
And Youth that hears with hastened breath,
But, throned in peace all these above,
The unrevealing eyes of Death.

Faces there were which won him yet,
Fair daughters of an iron age;
In iron truth portrayed he set
Warrior and statesman, bard and sage.
From hidden deeps their past he drew,
The ancestral bent of stock and stem;
More of their hearts than yet they knew
Thro' their own gaze looked out on them.

Yet oftenest in the past he walked,
With god or hero long gone by,
Oft, like his pictured Genius, talked
With rainbow forms that span the sky :
Thereto his soul had listed long,
When silent voices spake in air,
Hath mirrored many an old-world song
Remote and mystic, sad and fair.

.

Then as he walked, like one who dreamed,
Thro' silent highways silver-hoar,
More wonderful that city seemed,
And he diviner than before :
A voice was calling, All is well;
Clear in the vault Selene shone,
And over Plato's homestead fell
A shadow of the Parthenon.

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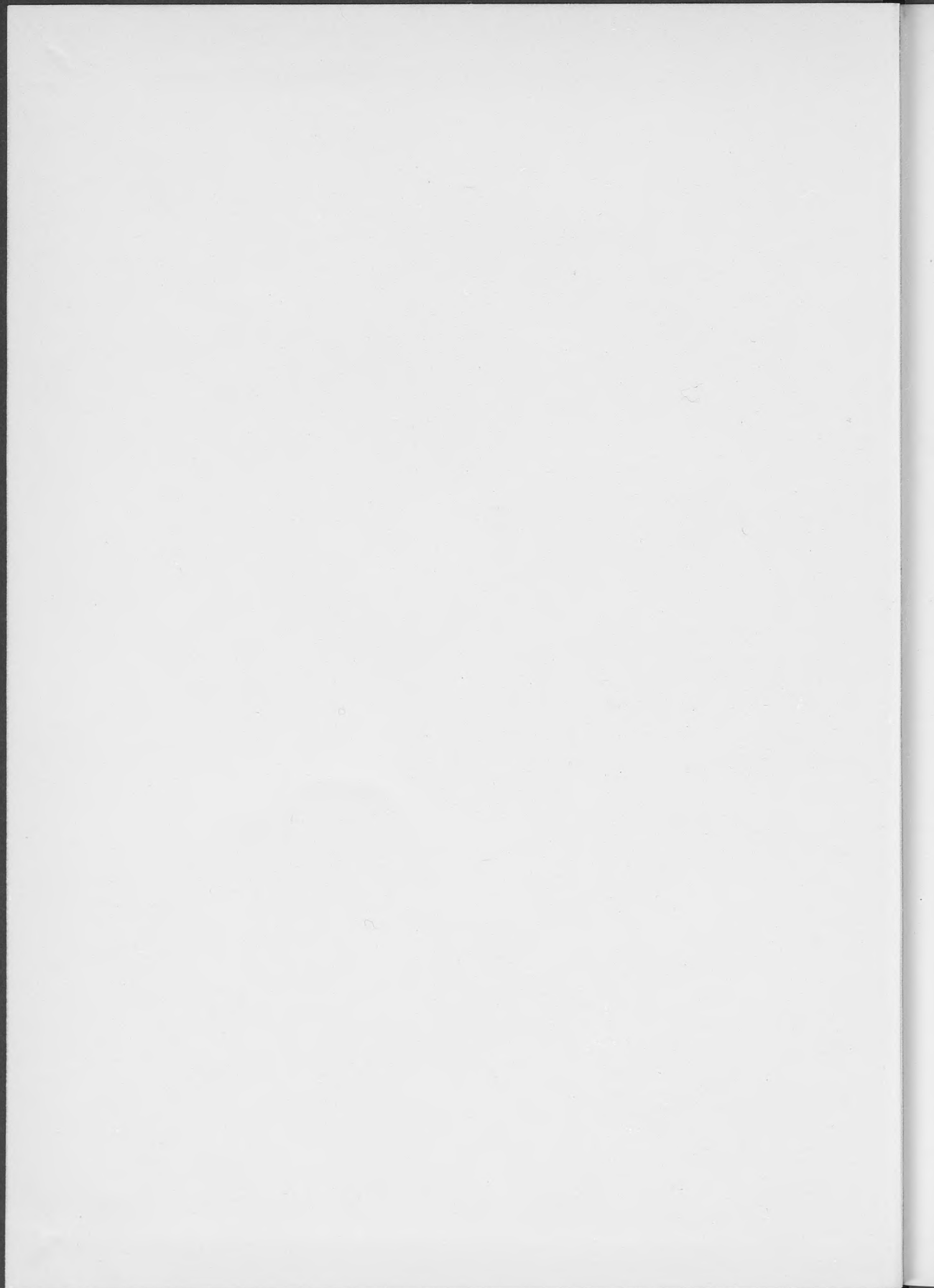
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